

reframing responsibility for well-being

o u t c o m e s

A REPORT TO THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION BY CON HOGAN & DAVID MURPHEY

## Authors' Note

This book results from ten years of thinking, writing, and practicing an “outcomes” approach in the human services field. The term “outcomes” reflects a set of positive expectations, progress toward which is measured through “indicators” of well-being. As practitioners of the “outcomes-and-indicators” approach, we know its effectiveness.

The lightbulb came on in our collective minds in 1992. Con, then Secretary of the Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS), met Frank Farrow, Director of the Center for the Study of Social Policy in Washington, D.C. Con's 10 years working in the private sector had introduced him to the power of common purpose and the value of measuring results. Along with then Vermont Commissioner of Education, Richard Mills, an education in outcomes thinking began among very interested pupils.

David brought his own background in education, psychology, and human development into government service in 1993, after earlier experience in academic positions. He appreciated how outcomes thinking applied theory to practice, making a more visible difference for more people.

Cheryl Mitchell, Vermont's long-term AHS Deputy Secretary, and Dr. Paula Duncan, a pediatrician and community-builder, were other key practitioners of outcomes work in Vermont. They, too, became keepers of the flame. Cheryl, in addition to caring deeply about the well-being of children and families, has an abiding commitment to the values of partnership, which drive outcomes work. Her qualities of patience and grace under fire have inspired countless others. Paula, through her devoted energy as a champion for adolescents, has won over more than a few skeptics.

Mark Friedman appeared midway in the development of our work as a tireless advocate of the outcomes way of thinking. A recovering state budget officer and itinerant consultant, Mark distilled many of these concepts through practical application, rationality, and common sense. More than most, Mark understands that even a relatively simple idea must be “sold” again and again, particularly with so many competing management models out there and so much general resistance to change.

The work of Lisbeth Schorr and particularly her book, *Common Purpose*,<sup>1</sup> greatly influenced our thinking, as did the documentation of this work across the country by Sara Watson of The Finance Project.

Bill Page, a retired Polaroid executive from Willoughby, Vermont, adopted Vermont's corrections department as his “project” some years ago. Later, he expanded his vision to the entire Vermont AHS. Bill's ever-evolving reading list, encouragement, and lessons on the concept of reciprocity laid some important groundwork for this book.

These professionals have influenced our thinking. They shine through these pages.

Finally, Sheila Harty provided a creative editing eye and helped us shape an unwieldy manuscript into something coherent.

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September 2002

### ENDNOTE

1. Schorr, L. B., *Common Purpose: Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods to Rebuild America* (New York: Anchor/Day, 1997).

## About the Authors

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Con holds a master's degree in government administration from Wharton Graduate Division of the University of Pennsylvania and earned his undergraduate degree at Rutgers. He was recently awarded an honorary Doctor of Law from the University of Vermont. Con had a 15-year career in Corrections, beginning as a Corrections Officer and finishing as Vermont's Corrections Commissioner. He was also President and CEO of a midsized corporation for a decade in the 1980s. Con has held appointed positions in five Vermont administrations, for both Republican and Democratic governors.

Con has actively supported and led a variety of efforts to improve the well-being of children and families. His work includes closing Vermont's only children's reform school, closing Vermont's only training school for persons designated developmentally disabled, and

dramatically reducing the census at the Vermont State Hospital. During his tenure as Secretary of Vermont's Agency of Human Services, the state implemented the country's first statewide welfare reform program in 1994. Under his direction, "outcomes" and "indicators" were established as a policy approach throughout Vermont, which has demonstrated measurable and significant improvement in the well-being of Vermont's people. Areas of improvement included child support collection, establishment of parentage, reduction in child abuse and teen pregnancy, access to health care, and early childhood health and nutrition.

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is Senior Policy Analyst at the Vermont Agency of Human Services. His responsibilities include preparation of two annual reports on indicators: *The Social Well-Being of Vermonters* and *Community Profiles*, which he introduced in 1995. David also produces the agency's *What Works* series, which summarizes effective prevention programs in multiple areas of well-being. He provides technical assistance to communities on use and interpretation of indicator data and evaluation models.

Prior to working for the agency, David spent two years with the Vermont Department of Health as a Research and Statistics Analyst. He has taught college courses in human development at the University of Michigan, the University of Vermont, Vermont Community College, and St. Michael's College in Vermont.

David holds a doctorate in developmental psychology and master's and bachelor's degrees in early education, all from the University of Michigan. Prior to moving to Vermont, he worked as a research assistant in adult development, in a mail-order business, and as a preschool teacher. He has published on a variety of topics, including parents' beliefs about children, use of administrative records for research into well-being, assessing readiness for school, cost-benefit analyses of social indicators (with Hogan), and several articles on using outcomes and indicators in partnership with communities.

# Executive Summary

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Government, and in particular the human-services sector, continues to confound perennial efforts at reform, reorganization, or “reinvention.” This book takes a different approach. It urges a primary focus on “outcomes”—plain-language statements that describe the well-being of people and communities. Outcomes connect professionals as well as ordinary citizens around fundamental common purposes. Focusing on outcomes brings new clarity, motivation, partnership, and responsibility to the work of improving the lives of communities.

We draw extensively on our experience in Vermont, a state that has been a leader in adopting the outcomes approach over the past decade. Using examples of real individuals and communities, we bring to life the potential for an outcomes perspective to change how government relates to its citizens and, more importantly, to achieve significant progress in addressing issues that concern people everywhere—healthy children, stable families, competent and responsible adults, and supportive communities.

The outcomes focus shares many features with successful business practices: an emphasis on regular measurement of results, a concern with assets (both tangible and intangible) and liabilities (short and long term), an interest in cost–benefit calculations, and a recognition of the importance of personal relationships for accomplishing goals. Thus, outcomes at the center of a human services agenda help to create new partnerships—across government agencies, with higher education, and with the private sector. Agreement on common purpose opens the door to a variety of contributions—large and small—to progress toward greater well-being.

In elaborating this perspective, we propose a new “physics” of social change. Because what gets measured gets done, focusing on outcomes measurement contributes to a “critical mass” of progress that pulls into its orbit additional indicators of positive change. Thus, we suggest, it can be that “anywhere leads to everywhere.” Along the way, there are many practical suggestions for engaging potential partners in this work (including policymakers and the media), adopting new models for evaluating community change, and changing institutional cultures.

We are realistic about the challenges to implementing the outcomes approach but argue that lack of public faith in government-as-usual, widespread access to electronic communication networks, and (most of all) the largely untapped energy of people eager to make a difference in their communities all provide motivation for a dedication to outcomes. Thus, ours is very much a positive message—that common purpose (and common sense), if appropriately harnessed, allow people to achieve surprising results.

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## A Unifying Framework

A fundamental change is occurring in the nation as authority and responsibility steadily devolve from the federal government to the states. This change has also shifted relationships among local communities and state governments. Responsively, an “outcomes” movement is gathering momentum. States and communities are striving to establish responsibility and accountability for the well-being of their citizens and attempting as well to measure that progress.

Most of us need a framework for understanding life-in-community. Whether it’s provided by a set of religious beliefs, a professional discipline, or a theory of change, a framework helps organize our thinking and motivate our interaction with others in both work and personal life.

The lack of a unifying framework has hampered those of us engaged in human services. In fact, the problem is too many competing frameworks, which prevent the progress that a consistent conceptual framework might facilitate. Without such, we continually face a chaotic set of challenges and opportunities. The problem is compounded by how our work is funded, which reinforces these multiple, competing frameworks.

**What Unifies Us Is Common Purpose** This book is an effort to bring a sense of “common purpose” to work on behalf of others. Common purpose preserves the accumulated experience and wisdom in the field of human services and the benefits that arise from the diversity of its approaches. At the same time, common purpose provides a unifying logic and rationale to the sum of our efforts. Our common purpose is *well-being for families and communities*.

More than simply another theoretical perspective, an outcomes perspective is based on years of practical

development and demonstrable results. These results, especially if sustained over time, bring a sense of hope and direction to a sometimes maddeningly complex enterprise. Indicators of progress on the outcomes quantify any changes, which further motivate progress.

We believe that the “outcomes-and-indicators” movement provides to the human services field common purpose and thus coherence. Most importantly, such a unifying framework brings a real sense of satisfaction to those who do this work. Improving the well-being of others is at the heart of what we do.

**What Do We All Want?** It’s simple when you think about it. We all want healthy neighborhoods and communities. We want families that contribute to their communities and benefit from strong community life. We want to live in places that are safe and clean. We want access to high-quality education. We want opportunities for sustainable work. And we want happy, healthy, learning lives for our children—who represent our future. We all share this straightforward set of expectations.

More and more, we know that government can take us only so far in this quest. While government has a historic and important role in assisting people, we are now realizing the extent to which people can contribute to their own well-being. We are beginning to understand the power of people as an intangible “asset” in our communities. An enormous capacity for change is inherent in the spirit and talents of those living in our neighborhoods and communities. We propose that the value of this potential is greater than the economic value of all of the programs for which our taxes have paid.

The power of common purpose, expressed through outcomes and indicators, is the essence of this book’s message.

**What Do People in Troubled Communities Want?**<sup>1</sup> People in troubled communities want the same things that the rest of us want! The needs of troubled communities only stand in sharper focus, because their sheer survival is often on the line.

People living in troubled communities want more economic opportunities—not just jobs, but *good* jobs, opportunities to build assets and raise their aspirations for the future. They want access to formal and informal networks that link people with jobs and careers. They want fewer barriers to employment; for example, having a criminal record, low educational achievement, or lack of job experience all pose formidable obstacles. They want opportunities to advance on the job, to be free of the storefront “check cashers” and instead open an account in a community-based bank or credit union. They want to receive interest or dividends, someday to own their own home and build equity.

They also want their work and home life within reasonable proximity of each other. They want to afford a car, if necessary, or have reliable, efficient public transportation. They want the same access to goods and services that other Americans enjoy.

They want their families to be part of rich social networks, which include supportive parents, extended families, friends and neighbors, and closer connections to community institutions. They also want strong connections to their faith institutions and active congregations.

They are looking for a safer environment, one characterized more by joy than by fear; less crime; fewer older residents homebound by fear, poor health, or loneliness because no one cares; more spontaneous gathering in parks and playgrounds; and fewer families who live isolated from the community.

They also want to have opportunities to engage in healthy activities, including more scheduled, adult-supervised time for their children, such as organized sports, along with safer parks, playgrounds, and open space.

Indeed, we all want the same things. We all have the same common purpose. These are the well-being outcomes that can unify the efforts of people, both professionals and nonprofessionals, working to build community.

## Chapter 1:

### COMMON PURPOSE

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Common purpose is closely related to the idea of “constructive reciprocity,” a concept developed in E. O. Wilson’s *Consilience*.<sup>2</sup> Boiled down to its basics, constructive reciprocity means that all parties in a relationship gain as a result of what each contributes to the others and what each receives in turn. To illustrate how reciprocity arises from common purpose we share an example from Vermont’s Department of Corrections.

In 1996, William Page<sup>3</sup> brought together some key managers in the Corrections Department and in Vermont’s Agency of Human Services. Their focus was to expand the Corrections work programs in ways that would create more partners and more opportunities. The main inmate work program at that time was a sawmill, where products such as guardrails and railroad ties were manufactured. The idea to be explored was how drawing on some new customers could enhance the plant’s capacity.

After Page led several work sessions, the following interrelated needs began to emerge. Recyclers in the state had been looking for places to use shredded tires; Corrections was looking for more markets for its rough timbers; and communities were behind in their highway construction projects, particularly because of a lack of bin-walls (the retaining structures used around bridges to hold back the tiers essential for support). In Vermont’s climate, bin-walls are susceptible to damage by repeated cycles of freezing and thawing.

The constructive reciprocity in the plan that was developed had Corrections bringing its rough timbers to the sites needing bin-walls. The shredded rubber material would be placed behind the timbers to provide needed flexibility. Page and others could not have devised this unlikely solution without recognizing the value of



common purpose and seeking it across diverse government agencies.

Nothing is more complicated than the work of government. However, outcomes thinking greatly simplifies government's efforts. A clear and compelling common purpose is a magnet that attracts contributions from many partners. By creating a unifying framework of common purpose, the values and contributions of different people can come together with considerable positive effect. Such is the power of outcomes.

**What Can Pull Us Apart?** Despite the many areas where we share common purpose, many things in today's world pull us apart. We are divided or separated by the programs and services, or goals and objectives, of many different organizations. In addition, our regional differences and politics, as well as competition, technology, and even the pace of life divide us from each other.

partners as threats to their existence, in part, because they have different "objectives."

#### *Funding Sources*

The old adage "follow the money" aptly describes the impact that a funding source has on a program's objectives and operations. At the local, state, and federal levels, the categorical nature of funding can often be traced to policies and rules that are inconsistent across agencies. This lack of consistency contributes greatly to agencies and their programs pulling apart rather than working together.

#### *Geography and Jargon*

In this vast country, the impact of geography on how we work cannot be underestimated. This mix of various perspectives and disciplines—in part a language issue

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#### *Programs and Services*

In this age of specialization, a proliferation of human services programs has evolved to deal with single dimensions of multifaceted problems. The number of social services available to assist people is beyond our capacity to inventory. Having so many programs at so many levels of jurisdiction is bewildering, not only to the general public but even to the people who administer these programs. Without a unifying framework, the direction and weight of these different efforts constantly pull us apart.

#### *Goals and Objectives*

Each of the thousands of programs in our communities and across the nation has its own goals and objectives. Different program objectives create an environment where working together becomes harder. We all know of "turf" wars among programs that view potential

compounded by regional differences—makes discussions across programs and initiatives very difficult. If you have ever been in a room where academics and service providers discuss program evaluation techniques, you have to wonder; *Did these people understand each other at all?*

#### *Politics and Budgets*

The rhythm of politics also pulls us apart. After a political transition, when the new broom has made a clean sweep, the positioning for advantage among political figures striving to connect themselves to popular programs only complicates the work. Likewise, the difference between state and federal fiscal years annually creates a tangle of overlapping, incomplete programs and budgets, which makes aligning these efforts extremely difficult.



### *Levels of Government*

The competition across layers of government also frustrates real progress, particularly in states where a direct relationship between state government and localities is absent. A recent book<sup>4</sup> by the late Alan Karcher<sup>5</sup> examines the impact of structural complexity on the ability to govern. Writing about his own state of New Jersey, Karcher argues that the proliferation of governing layers—in towns, townships, cities, counties, special authorities, taxing authorities, and state government—makes for a state difficult to govern. Nevertheless, such a governmental “stew” is expected to function rationally and with common purpose. But the alignment needed to do so is missing.

### *Fear of Change and the Speed of Life*

To these straightforward observations of what pulls us apart, add the general resistance-to-change characteristic of most people. No question, the more complex the governance, the greater is the inertia. Yet the speed of change in our society also leaves us unable to connect easily with each other. Understandably, the technology explosion, the geometric expansion of knowledge in science, the ability to travel from one place to another in ever-shorter periods of time, together with the general pace and scheduling of our lives, make any mobilization difficult among those who want to get something done.

We badly need a way to reframe our responsibilities.

**What Can Pull Us Together?** The evolution in this country of complex organizations, whether business or governmental, demands a unifying framework that focuses the complexity around common goals. Well-articulated common purpose can bring diverse organizations together and restore much of the effectiveness that disparate geographies, languages, programs, objectives, and the like have eroded.

Common purpose also creates special relationships among people. The bond in a group who share the same values can be extraordinary. By the same token, the power of bonding around common values and purposes

in its negative form (often ethnic and/or religious) is the root of much conflict in the world today. Take this classic experiment in social psychology literature,<sup>6</sup> which illustrates the power of common purpose.

At a summer camp, boys were divided into two groups. The researchers’ first goal was to create adversarial relations between the two, a task that was easily accomplished. A series of competitive games and contests between the groups quickly led to intense intra-group loyalties and inter-group hostility. Sound familiar? Think of the turf battles over money, power, and so on that characterize so much of our lives from local social services to politics in Washington.

Next, the researchers wanted to see whether they could overcome the rivalry they had created. One strategy that they tried was to bring the two groups together in social activities with wide appeal to these youngsters: going to the movies, getting together for a meal, and so on. Instead of reducing the conflict between the groups, however, these occasions only gave the groups opportunities to taunt and otherwise provoke each other. So, next the researchers contrived several urgent problems that could be solved only by the two groups’ working together: for example, a breakdown in the camp’s truck; an interruption in the camp’s water supply.

In the course of working together toward solutions to these problems, the two groups of boys not only overcame their earlier prejudices but actually acknowledged the positive contributions that out-group members had made.

In summarizing these results, the researchers referred to the role of “superordinate goals”: circumstances that by their nature call for cooperation. That is, common purpose.

**Common-Purpose Expressions** One could argue that the power of common purpose has evolutionary origins, such as a commitment to “the hunt” or “the

clan” in the interest of survival. More recently in our history, a sense of common purpose for the nation or a community has pulled disparate forces together toward shared ends. In these moments, a shared agenda overcomes the centrifugal forces that pull us apart. Consider the following examples.

*“No Taxation Without Representation”*

The rallying cry of the American Revolution brought many factions together to begin the process of breaking away from the British king. *“Taxation without representation”* was the subject of Thomas Paine’s papers and the impetus for the Boston Tea Party. It was a central theme behind the creation of a nation and reappeared in the checks and balances written into the Constitution. It was our nation’s first clearly expressed common purpose—and a call to arms.

*“The Union Must Be Preserved”*

Although this began as the slogan of one side, the Civil War itself provided a ghastly reminder that our still relatively new nation could not be easily divided, even for the sake of deeply held principles. With brother fighting brother, with obvious disparities of resources between North and South, and a nationhood still only partly realized, the Civil War brought home to those on both sides the folly of making two nations from one. Within our common purpose, we would have to work out our differences.

*“Win the War”*

One of the most powerful outcome statements in our history was *“Win the war.”* From an initial position of serious military disadvantage following Pearl Harbor, we forged a common purpose that transformed our nation in four years from an isolationist, inward-looking country to the largest and strongest power that the world has ever known. After the Japanese surprise attack, the country came together around this common purpose. Though only a three-word declaration, *“Win the war”* had strong emotional impact. Everyone knew that they had contributions to make, and they made them in ways great and small.<sup>7</sup>

*“Put a Man on the Moon Within 10 Years”*

Another bold vision that brought our nation together was enhanced by the fear of losing an era-defining race to the Soviets, whose early successes in satellite technology threatened our security. *“Put a man on the moon”* represented the American spirit of challenge, adventure, and “go for it” spirit. President Kennedy’s bold vision captivated the nation and captured the imagination of the world. This common purpose spoke to our highest needs as human beings to achieve and foreshadowed a new perspective on our fragile planet Earth. When Neil Armstrong stepped out of the eggshell-fragile lunar module, saying *“One small step for man . . . one giant leap for mankind,”* an entire world was watching and praying.

*“Clean Out the Crack Houses”*

This rallying point played out in cities and neighborhoods across the nation during the 1980s. Khatib Waheed<sup>8</sup> of St. Louis tells the story of neighbors coming together and marching in the streets to send an unmistakable message to the merchants of drugs. Their message translated into civic action and, ultimately, community improvement. Such stories leave no question that a common purpose can bring communities and neighborhoods more closely together.

*“End Welfare as We Know It”*

This statement drove the most far-reaching change in any social program since the Depression of the 1930s and the subsequent New Deal. Opinion polls told candidates that more than 90 percent of the public wanted to see changes in welfare policy and practice across the nation. Exactly what kind of change was needed, the general public was unsure; they just wanted the system to change—and change significantly. This phrase galvanized that change, which culminated in the national welfare reform bill of 1996. In government, *ending welfare as we know it* was embraced and espoused by a majority of politicians in both parties at every level of leadership. The unprecedented result changed how welfare programs are conceived and operated in every state.

Clearly, a common purpose has shown its power to break through previous inertia in the status quo.

**Common Language** Bringing an outcomes framework to our work offers an opportunity to make better sense of the language used in and around government. To the public, the use of undisciplined language, especially professional jargon, pushes people further to the outside looking in. Not understanding the public sector contributes to the general apathy that people feel toward the work of government in general.

At the same time, we must be careful not to “over-define” the work of government agencies. The essence of outcomes work in human services agencies is to create environments where people feel comfortable contributing to the well-being of families and communities. Too much definition can choke off the creative process that thrives on room to dream, connect, and move forward. Finding the right level of definition is an art.

Mark Friedman, of the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute,<sup>9</sup> is a tireless champion of clear language. Friedman has provided some commonsense definitions, which we follow in this book, as they have shown a practical utility for some years now.

- **Outcomes** (sometimes results or goals) are conditions of well-being for children, families, or communities.
- **Indicators** are measures that help quantify the achievement of an outcome.
- **Strategies** are collections of coherent actions that have a reasoned chance of improving outcomes.

Definitions can help if they bring together a number of separate concepts in some new ways. We will use the words “outcomes,” “results,” and “goals” interchangeably to describe conditions of well-being. In addition, anything that qualifies as a “measure” of an outcome, result, or goal qualifies as an “indicator.” Too often, over-specialized, unfamiliar terms systematically exclude people from participation. By using several

words to mean the same thing, we hope to bring as many people as possible under this tent.

So what is “well-being”? No single definition rules; it is appropriate that each community imagine the concept for itself. However, most would agree that well-being includes traditional concepts of health (physical, mental, and spiritual) for the individual, as well as public health for families and communities.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Many of the following thoughts are drawn from an essay by Douglas Nelson, that provided the Foreword to the 2000 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD.
2. Wilson, E. O., *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Random House, 1999).
3. A retired Polaroid executive from Willoughby, VT.
4. Karcher, A. J., *New Jersey's Multiple Municipal Madness* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999).
5. Alan Karcher, speaker of the New Jersey Assembly from 1982 to 1986, was a principled fighter for activist government, *Bergen County Record*, July 28, 1999.
6. Sherif, M., “Experiments in Group Conflict,” *Scientific American* 195 (No. 5), 54–58, 1956.
7. Con has a vivid memory as a child of little things in his household that were considered important contributions to win the war, such as many forms of recycling. People collected cans, tin foil, paper ... just about any material could be useful. Clothing drives were held for increasing numbers of war refugees, and blood drives brought strong turnout. War bonds were purchased, and copper pennies were saved. The entire country was engaged and mobilized in this powerful common purpose.
8. Khatib Waheed is Director of Walbridge Caring Communities, an integrated service initiative at Walbridge Elementary School in inner-city St. Louis, MO.
9. See [www.resultsaccountability.com](http://www.resultsaccountability.com).

## Elements of Outcomes Work

We've been at "outcomes" work for more than a decade in Vermont. In the process, we have learned some interesting lessons about well-being and the motivation for this kind of work. The motivating center is the outcomes themselves. Unlike much of government jargon, outcomes are positive motivating words, especially when they trace a developmental path through life: for example, "Children Are Ready for School."

Progress toward outcomes is measurable, within limits, and reflected in quantifiable data—the indicators. The indicators direct our attention to where specific efforts are needed: for example, the "preschool immunization rate" is an indicator of the outcome "Children Are Ready for School."

Interactivity is integral to outcomes work. That is, if we make progress on any outcome, then other outcomes will improve over time. Such news is heartening in an often stressful profession. Success on outcomes has a critical-mass effect that feeds on itself (see Chapter 13). An outcomes framework contributes to seeing real changes occur, well beyond those expected from traditional ways of directing resources.

An outcomes perspective is a unifying framework that can motivate communities, political leaders, human services workers, and managers. This framework is also weighted on behalf of children. Employees and managers, nonprofit organizations, and communities yearn to do more prevention. An outcomes framework promotes and justifies that motivation. The motivational aspect of outcomes work is particularly important, because communities are the right place to do the lion's share of this work. In general, local communities have the advantage of using a variety of strategies flexibly, often inventively, within the context of an outcomes framework.

How public policy is developed, who's involved, and the degree to which policies are integrated continually changes. An outcomes approach can direct this change. The old way of developing policy was often driven by Congress within highly controlled and narrowly preset categories. This categorical focus was on activities rather than outcomes and on the eligibility of certain groups of people for particular services and programs.

Outcomes and indicators provide a better, more integrated view of the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. Prevention and earlier intervention are emerging as key principles. Driven by outputs and their results, rather than by inputs, an outcomes approach provides better and more accountable public policy.

**What's Driving This Policy Change?** Numerous opinion polls reflect a good deal of public cynicism toward the federal government. This cynicism contrasts with a generally more sympathetic view toward state and local governments. In fact, federal legislation has often encouraged a new flexibility by states and local jurisdictions. Welfare reform and workforce development are two examples. A new way of organizing to obtain broadly defined outcomes for people and communities is emerging—and not just by reorganizing old categories.

Outcomes of well-being are the common purpose toward which we all strive. Therefore, outcomes serve as the unifying framework within which many partners can contribute. Community development activity has exploded across the country, focusing on improving people's lives. The leaders in this work are in state governments, community groups, foundations, and businesses. An outcomes approach involves all of them getting the job done.

**Vermont Caveats** This book is not exclusively about Vermont. However, Vermont is where we have learned fundamental lessons about using outcomes and indicators to promote well-being.

As we all know, Vermont is small. In fact, with a population of only 600,000, our state is very small. Our growth rate is also modest. In many parts of this nation, Vermont's population would not even comprise a county; in some larger cities, it might qualify as a neighborhood—but therein lies the appeal. Vermont has a scale small enough to be a laboratory for change. Our size allows an understanding of the dynamics of that change. If the reader thinks of Vermont as a neighborhood, then some of what we have learned here makes more sense.

When we began several years ago to present our experiences to audiences outside Vermont, we were naturally reluctant to draw implications of national import from our work. How could Vermont offer any useful lessons for others? Another difficulty was that Vermont's indicators have always looked good relative to national norms. Vermont has the mixed blessing of being a rural state, racially and ethnically homogeneous, in a region of the country (New England) that historically has had better social outcomes than many other regions. What is less well-known is the progress Vermont has continued to make on a number of key indicators, such as reducing teen pregnancy and child abuse and neglect.

The positive *change* is the really remarkable story. Now, we no longer feel the need to make excuses about the Vermont successes. Over the past several years, we've seen that the kind of work Vermont has organized around outcomes is eminently transferable to other localities. In fact, often other states and communities are moving to the heart of the work much more quickly and efficiently than Vermont did—in part, because of our earlier example ... or so we like to believe.

But forget about Vermont for now. Our results show that significant positive change can occur, given a broad policy framework. Many places now engaged in similar efforts are finding that success is really about developing common purpose and political will across communities in order to improve the well-being of people, wherever they are.

## Chapter 2:

### WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

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To this point, we've used the word "outcomes" rather loosely. As the outcomes-and-indicators movement has gained traction throughout the country over the past few years, outcomes have come to mean almost any result of a particular effort. Yet the right language is important—not only for generating common purpose, but also for building the necessary partnerships.

When we look at examples of powerful outcomes, several characteristics become quickly apparent. Here are some characteristics of effective outcomes statements within the human services field.

#### **Powerful Outcomes Are ...**

##### *... Clear, Declarative Statements of Well-Being*

When people (even those in government!) initially give voice to what they desire, they speak in simple, declarative sentences. They do not use words from the alphabet-soup of government acronyms. Instead, they use user-friendly phrases that reflect what is important in their lives, such as "All Children Are Ready for School." The traditional government way of saying that is "School Readiness," which is not a sentence. When we walk down the street and talk about children being ready for school, we do not say "school readiness." Simple, complete sentences convey best the power of an idea.

Outcomes are essentially about values. That accounts for their power and also for the stake people have in them. These are what matter to people. And they are what ought to matter to government as well.

A fundamental role for government is to "steer" (set an agenda for all to pursue), not "row" (do all the work itself), in guiding communities toward states of health or well-being.<sup>1</sup> The function of service delivery (a "rowing" role) is easy for government to fall back on, thus



losing sight of its more critical function of “steering.” Real leadership provides direction. In fact, if government could free itself from preoccupation with “delivery” mechanisms, it would discover a flexibility that invites alternative solutions—often from previously unexpected partners.

When we use outcomes statements as reference points, we keep our focus on “first principles.” We can recall countless meetings, ostensibly about community development, that made little progress because the group failed to “begin with the end in mind.”<sup>2</sup> By first identifying outcomes and then referring to them regularly when things get “off course,” the discussion invariably stays more focused and more vital. A focus on “mission” rather than on “rules and regulations” is a characteristic of new governance models.<sup>3</sup> Outcomes represent mission—specifically, not “what we do” but “the results for which we aim.”

#### *... Stated in Positive Terms*

Consistent with the notion of common purpose, outcomes are best stated in positive terms with strong emotional content. “All Babies Are Born Healthy” is an example. That sentence grabs us by the heart. An effective goal statement is stronger when it connects to our deepest feelings. Well-chosen outcomes can provide a positive context within which programs can find a greater, more positive purpose.

Health is a positive context. Outcomes of well-being not only address individual health and public health, but also extend as well to the “health” of the natural systems (air, water, soil, plants, and animals) with which we are all interdependent. Well-being also includes safety and security issues—freedom from crime and violence and from fear of them. Well-being includes having basic material necessities and comforts: shelter, food, clothing, medicine, and some insurance against emergencies. Well-being includes a sense of purpose, belonging, and competence as well as a sense that one’s contributions to family and community matter. Well-being includes the intangibles that make

up “roots”—that is, a sense of place, valuing a community’s traditions, and having optimism about its future.

Well-being is clearly more than the absence of illness or blight but also more than superficial “prosperity.” In fact, well-being has something to do with having reserves of strength (capital, assets, resilience) that can be tapped in times of need. Paradoxically, when these reserves are shared, they are enhanced rather than depleted.

#### *... Ideally Developmental*

Outcomes are most powerful when they mirror important developmental stages in our lives. Describing desired outcomes in terms of life’s journey is emotionally engaging, not only as a process but also as an expression of commitment to this work. The journey begins with “Pregnant Women and Young Children Thrive” and ends with “Elders and People with Disabilities Live with Dignity and Independence in Settings They Prefer.” Thus, outcomes follow the stories of our lives from birth to death.

Outcomes that follow the life cycle have an inherent appeal. This developmental framework triggers a larger potential. People instinctively relate to the life sequence, which connects with shared human ideals and values much more deeply than any government mandate could ever do.

A developmental framework also builds in a preference for prevention and early intervention. Because each outcome is temporally linked to those coming before (and after), a discussion on investing in success early in life is difficult to avoid. Our growing knowledge of brain development and the lasting damage of early deprivation (or, conversely, the lasting value of positive stimulation) reinforces this idea. At the same time, the developmental approach also confirms the value of each life stage in its own right, implying that infants, children, youth, adults, and elders have different but equally important concerns.

*... Interactive and Interdependent*

When outcomes are arrayed developmentally, they are, by definition, interactive. If babies are born healthy, they have a better chance of thriving as infants. If they thrive as infants, they have a better chance of being ready for school. If they are ready for school, they have a better chance of succeeding in school. If they succeed in school, they have a better chance of making healthy decisions as youth ... and so on, up the developmental ladder.

The interdependent nature of outcomes is an underappreciated yet hopeful aspect of this work. Mark Friedman describes how indicators often travel in “herds.” When lead indicators begin to move in a direction, they pull along other related indicators. The concept of leading and lagging indicators, especially when considered in cross-sector work, also contributes to a perspective on the cumulative nature of outcomes (see Chapter 13).

enough to improve the indicators of well-being in any one outcome, that positive result triggers other positive results across the rest of the developmental array. If we see an improvement in the indicator “teen pregnancies” for the outcome “Youth Choose Healthy Behaviors,” we can expect to see improvement in many other indicators over the life cycle.

*... Collaborative by Nature*

One characteristic of a good outcome statement is an intentional reference to goals not achievable by any individual, family, specific program, or single organization. Outcomes require collaborative effort by people from many walks of life. In contrast, traditional ways in which government organizes its work promote the fragmentation and specialization of services. Each specialization has its own objectives and statements of purpose. Their outcomes, accordingly, are confined to the work of specialty programs; as a result, neither collaborative

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**One characteristic of a good outcome statement is an intentional reference to goals not achievable by any individual, family, specific program, or single organization. Outcomes require collaborative effort by people from many walks of life.**

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*... Measurable by Standard Indicators*

Outcomes, by and large, are measurable by a set of indicators. Typically (and ideally), no single program “owns” these indicators. Indicators reflect a broad responsibility of efforts, yet should have sufficient specificity as measurement tools. For example, “teen pregnancy rate” is an indicator of the outcome “Youth Choose Healthy Behaviors.” Standard measures of teen pregnancy exist and, typically, departments of public health track and report these statistics. Important contributors to improvement in this indicator should include not only public health professionals, but also those in departments of child welfare, employment, mental health, education, and corrections (to name a few), in addition to parents, schools and, of course, teens themselves.

The interactivity and interdependence of outcomes is particularly apparent at the indicator level as a result of accumulated progress over time. If we are fortunate

work nor breadth of thought is encouraged for purposes that lie beyond separate domains.

A powerful outcome statement should invite others in allied professions and disciplines to contribute to the work. The language of the outcome should promote a natural coming together of effort and focus. To judge whether a statement is truly an outcome of common purpose rather than an expression of a single program’s effort, ask whether the indicators that measure the outcome are beyond the responsibility of any specific program, organization, or individual. The more sectors needed to support the outcome, the more broad-based the contributions and the stronger the overall result.

*... Comparable at All Levels*

Outcomes and their indicators provide the opportunity to compare how we are doing from place to place and over time. The idea of comparability has been resisted



by many sectors for many years. Yet, it's human nature to compare how we are doing and, when done in a positive spirit, that can motivate change. When done in an encouraging way, the capacity to compare can provide an important incentive for improvement. In Vermont, we like to use the analogy of the flower garden, which most towns plant in the town green or at an entrance to the community. Vermonters comment on the comparative beauty and vibrancy of their neighbors' gardens.

Of course, comparisons need to be fair, and not all possible comparisons are appropriate. Fair comparisons take into account the sociodemographic characteristics of communities: urban or rural settings, racial and ethnic composition, income levels, as well as subtler but important historical and cultural aspects. Useful learning can emerge if each community identifies "peer" communities for comparison.

**An Outcomes Sampling** If we understand common purpose, then we understand the power of an outcomes way of thinking. The most effective outcome statements are those that embody common purpose. When people can instinctively relate to the goal expressed, an invitation to contribute toward that goal is implicit in the language. Finding the right language of common purpose is a critical part of focusing and accelerating community efforts toward improvement.

As we look at these examples of outcome statements, note the words. These words aren't unique. We see them every day in one way or another. Any jurisdiction across the country might create an outcomes framework with just such words.

#### *"Success by Six"*

This phrase first came to the attention of Vermonters through its use in Minneapolis's United Way effort. In 1993 Vermont Governor Howard Dean adopted the term to represent all efforts in our state to ensure that children were ready for school. Vermont's "Success by Six" model has been a rallying point for people in our state in the years since, and in quite a few places across the nation. A similar outcome is "All Children Are Ready for School." Most people have a sense of what that

means. It also has a strong emotional tug. Of course we want our children to be ready for school. "Success by Six" captures that hope—short and to the point.

Moreover, the phrase begs the question, "*How can you contribute to children being ready for school?*" Thus, it's a positive concept that can motivate people. This outcome has created an environment for many organizations, which in the past have had a difficult time working together, to join in achieving a clear public purpose.

#### *"All Children Have a Human Relationship That They Can Depend On"*

Trondheim is a region with about 150,000 people, halfway up the long, craggy coast of Norway. Con had the privilege of spending a day there with about 50 representatives of many people-oriented organizations of the region—some governmental, some nonprofit, and some volunteer civic organizations. At one point after considerable discussion on the criteria for a powerful outcome statement, the question was asked of the group, "*What statement of common purpose, if you all agreed to it, could bring you together toward a common end?*"

After considerable struggle and shaping of the language, a declarative statement was advanced: "*All Children Have a Human Relationship That They Can Depend On.*" They agreed that all Norwegians would understand and concur with this aspiration. Consensus was also that many indicators of well-being would likely improve if all children had such a relationship.

Everyone left that day feeling strongly that the outcome's clear language had brought many people and organizations closer together to advance this common purpose. They were left with the challenge to think about what indicators could help determine whether progress was being made toward that outcome. Further, they now had hope that, over time, other ideas and strategies could be developed to advance that ideal. All agreed that this powerful outcome had touched their hearts.

### *“All Babies Are Born Healthy”*

This example of common purpose cuts directly to the heart. When a child is born, all who know the child, regardless of their circumstances in life, want the very best for that child. A centerpiece of that caring is a natural, human concern for the health of a child, particularly at the start of life.

Emotionally laden language, when expressed this clearly, has more power than any clinical terminology, such as infant mortality or low birth weight. The language of “All Babies Are Born Healthy” has the power to attract people to assume a responsibility for seeing that the desired outcome actually occurs. Implicitly, health care systems, hospitals, churches, education systems, and families are invited to consider how they can each contribute to ensuring that this goal is realized. The language invites nonspecialists to the effort. We can all imagine creative ways to advance that heart-felt, positive agenda.

### *“Learning for Life”*

A broad group of caring citizens in Barre, Vermont, adopted this common purpose at a two-day retreat in 1998. The meeting was organized to find a common theme that could engage Barre residents in response to some very troublesome indicators. This statement on which they agreed was powerful enough to bring many people to the table.

Over time, that ideal attracted much mutual effort that previously had occurred separately. Too often, people are engaged in helpful activity without knowing that their neighbors are pursuing the same agenda. In this case, the exchange of ideas and information continued over a period of several years. As a result, the work of each citizen of Barre was strengthened. Over a four-year period, important activities were coordinated on behalf of individual and community literacy. The “Learning for Life” framework ultimately proved strong enough to serve as a foundation for considerable change in other important indicators of well-being for the people of Barre (see Appendix D).

### *“Covering Kids”*

In 1998 the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Southern Institute for Children launched a broad-based national effort to increase the number of children enrolled in health insurance plans. The idea of “Covering Kids” for health care is elegantly simple. The overall effort combines public education with state and county health care improvement. The initiative builds on existing outreach efforts and uses local collaboratives to spread the word. “Covering Kids” brings people together instinctively, because it is simply stated; they know what this idea means. Furthermore, few people would disagree that this goal is important for our children.

### *“Youth Choose Healthy Behaviors”*

This declarative statement is one of Vermont’s unique outcomes. Its value is in speaking about youth with a positive voice. Typical indicators for youth reflect the “bad” things they do, by measuring, for example, rates of youth crime or school violence, teen pregnancy, or drug use. Thus, typical outcomes refer to keeping youth safe from harm or, conversely, ensuring society’s safety *from* youth. Taken together, a collection of such negative outcomes and indicators creates a disheartening picture. Accordingly, strategies and programs developed to achieve such outcomes focus on what we don’t want, rather than on what we do.

Adopting a positive statement, such as “Youth Choose Healthy Behaviors,” requires a different set of indicators. Such indicators wouldn’t necessarily exclude indicators of risk, but they would provide a much richer and more balanced representation of today’s youth by including positive measures as well, such as “Youth Doing Well in School” or “Youth Volunteering in Their Communities.”

Once we change the “lens” through which we view young people, we see hopeful signs. For example, across the country teen pregnancy rates are declining. Teen sexually transmitted diseases are on a strong downward trend. Violence by teens is down. Teens are using seat belts more often. Other teen risk behaviors, such as

cigarette smoking and marijuana use, are moderating and, in some places, beginning to decline. Once we look, hopeful signs appear.

*“All Children Can...”*

Con first heard this unfinished outcome statement in Yeruham, Israel, an immigrant community of about 10,000 people in the Negev Desert. It’s a remarkable statement for this community of people from all over the world. Many came here, stayed a while, and then moved on. When the most capable immigrants moved away, those remaining in Yeruham often had the least skills and the lowest self-esteem.

The strategies that emerged varied widely and included investment trusts and local collaboratives. Lasting over a decade, the outcome “Caring Communities” has served as an effective organizing idea for a wide range of helpful work on behalf of people in Missouri. The result has been a significant change in their indicators of well-being.

**Vermont’s Outcomes Framework** Among the many other effective outcome statements available, we are most familiar with the following list of Vermont’s outcomes. We will refer to one or more of these outcomes throughout this book.

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**Lasting over a decade, the outcome “Caring Communities” has served as an effective organizing idea for a wide range of helpful work on behalf of people in Missouri. The result has been a significant change in their indicators of well-being.**

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For many years, how the people of Yeruham felt about themselves was a defining issue for the community. When they adopted the rallying cry, “All Children Can...,” a breakthrough occurred in how people thought about themselves. The power in this outcome statement is that everyone can complete the sentence. “All Children Can...” conveys the sense that any achievement is possible. The sky’s the limit. This community’s legacy of negative self-image was transformed by this outcome’s power. Belief in itself—and especially in its children—is now the common purpose for this community.

*“Caring Communities”*

This gentle phrase grows on you. Gary Stangler,<sup>4</sup> Missouri’s long-term Director of Social Services, pioneered this outcome as a way to bring communities together around common purpose. The “Caring Communities” effort has stood the test of time in Missouri, a place with serious urban problems of poverty and malaise. In many places, “Caring Communities” succeeded in creating a new climate and a process for change.

These outcomes refer to the whole population of our state. They do not apply only to special populations, populations at risk, clients of services, or poor people. They apply to all Vermonters.

- Families, Youth, and Individuals Are Engaged in Their Community’s Decisions and Activities
- Pregnant Women and Young Children Thrive
- Children Are Ready for School
- Children Succeed in School
- Children Live in Safe and Supported Families
- Youth Choose Healthy Behaviors
- Youth Successfully Transition to Adulthood
- Adults Lead Healthy and Productive Lives
- Elders and People with Disabilities Live with Dignity and Independence in Settings They Prefer
- Communities Provide Safety and Support for Families and Individuals

# Chapter 3:

## INDICATORS

Indicators measure well-being. Within the human services field, indicators refer to data that quantify achievement toward a goal. Indicator data also measure progress along the way or any changes in direction. Such benchmarks can motivate further progress or policy adjustments. Consequently, having good indicators provides a feedback system that is important for achieving outcomes.

**The Value of Measurement** In their elegantly simple way, indicators tell us where we've been, where we are, and where we want to go. Indicators can be effectively portrayed at the national, state, regional, and local levels. Considerable literature is emerging about the role of localized data to motivate communities toward better results.

### Effective Indicators...

#### *...Are Best Presented Over Time*

Point-in-time indicators have limited value; they can establish a baseline but, by themselves, indicate little about whether the information they convey is "good" or "bad" news. In contrast, being able to discern a pattern—of improvement, deterioration, or even fluctuation within specified limits—provides much more powerful and motivating information. Producing indicators that span a reasonable length of time brings a sense of direction to life: "Are we getting better or getting worse?" For that reason, an indicator system may need a number of years before its full value or its defects become evident.

#### *...Are Interactive With Other Indicators*

If one indicator is improving, we can be fairly certain that others are improving also. Likewise, if one indicator is getting worse, others are probably getting worse. All indicators are connected, although we may not

know the precise circuitry for those relationships. Indicators help create "critical mass" for change. Of course, when we find a set of indicators going in the right direction, we can have confidence that the outcomes measured by those indicators are also changing in the right direction (see Chapter 13).

#### *...Help Us Compare Ourselves with Others*

Being able to compare how we are doing against others and across time is a very human and motivating impulse. When a set of outcomes is arrayed developmentally, indicators can support an early investment in prevention. When tracked over time, indicators also support other techniques, such as calculating the cost-benefit ratio associated with change. Comparability brings the world of human services more into alignment with other sectors, such as business and economics.

#### *...Connect Us More Closely With Business*

The business world has used outcomes and indicators in their balance sheets for many years. The use of indicators in the human services field lets us forge stronger relationships with that critically important constituency. While quantifying outcomes across organizations and agencies, indicators can also tie those organizations and agencies more closely together. If they measure common outcomes, indicators can help create common purpose.

#### *...Help Build Public Confidence in Government*

How government typically conducts itself is often contrary to how we run our homes and businesses. Thus, government's use of indicators carries significant if intangible value in the public's mind. With a better public face comes broader political support for the work of government and its employees. Also, indicator trends usually transcend political cycles. When indicator data are presented over time, no single administration or official can claim or attract too much credit—whether for improvement or deterioration. Within a broad outcomes framework, credit (and, for that matter, responsibility for trends headed the wrong way) needs to be widely shared.

... *Motivate Us to Improve*

Indicators measure our well-being. In ordinary ways, we are constantly measuring ourselves, sometimes deliberately but often unconsciously, thousands of times during the course of the day. How many miles to the next exit? How big is my household budget? What is the value of my work over time? All these informal and formal ways of measuring where we are—as individuals, families, communities, and businesses—are a natural part of our lives.

**Choosing Indicators for Outcomes** Choosing the right indicators to quantify outcomes is one of the key processes in developing a workable outcomes-and-indicator framework. Ideally, the process evolves with constant and careful attention. Along the way, stakeholders develop new data sources, identify new priorities, and reach new understanding about the relative importance of particular indicators to outcomes. Thus, “the simple act of defining measures is extremely enlightening to many organizations.”<sup>5</sup>

Indicators—and even outcomes—will vary from place to place, because they reflect local differences in values, emphasis, and style. One way to deal with this variation is to compile a core list of outcomes and indicators that are measured on a state- or countywide basis but then invite communities to supplement this list for their own purposes. Overall buy-in by local communities on a core list of indicators is essential to an effective system. The core list ends up being the basis for place-to-place comparisons on the indicators. Since local communities’ own indicators are specific to their needs, they often enhance the core list with additional important quantifiable aspects of agreed-upon outcomes.

#### *A Sampling of Outcomes and Indicators*

For any given outcome, a composite list of indicators shows whether progress is being made toward an outcome. That core set of indicators brings outcomes to life. Having too many indicators is a mistake. They complicate the work and create problems when putting the data together to create a holistic picture. With fewer indicators, (re)creating the composite is easier.

The following sample illustrates how a list of indicators, which quantify progress toward three broad outcomes, need not be extensive.<sup>6</sup>

#### ► OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS

ALL ...

##### *Pregnant Women and Young Children Thrive*

- Rate of Low Birth Weight
- Rate of Pregnant Women Smoking
- Percent of Births with Adequate Prenatal Care
- Percent of Women with Prenatal Care in First Trimester
- Infant Mortality Rate
- Toddler Immunization Rate
- Percent of Young Children with Health Insurance
- Rate of Injuries Resulting in Hospitalization
- Young Child Poverty Rate

##### *Children Are Ready for School*

- Rates of Child Abuse and Neglect, Birth to Age Six
- Rate of Childhood Lead Poisoning
- Rate of Childhood Asthma
- Rate of Hunger or Malnutrition
- Rate of Participation in Preschool
- Percent of Kindergartners Fully Immunized
- Percent of Children Ready for Kindergarten

##### *Children Succeed in School*

- School Attendance Rate
- High School Graduation Rate
- Rate of Student Suspensions
- Percent of Students Reading at Grade Level by Third Grade
- Child Poverty Rate
- Student:Teacher Ratio
- English/Language Arts Assessment Scores
- Arts Assessment Scores
- Math Assessment Scores
- Percent of Students with Special Education Plans
- Scholastic Assessment Test Scores

**What Makes a Good Indicator?** No single indicator is a “keystone.” Just as people are multidimensional, so is community well-being. Rather than investing too much energy in single indicators, paying attention to patterns of multiple indicators is more important.

All indicators are imperfect. In the first place, any finite set of indicators cannot do justice to an outcome. Outcomes are inherently *qualitative* statements, whereas indicators are *quantitative*. Therefore, a certain disconnect always exists between an outcome and the specific measures chosen to monitor its achievement. In the second place, all data are imperfect. Data come with defects of reliability, validity, completeness, and other sources of error, known and unknown. The best one can hope for is that an indicator is reasonably accurate, reliable, complete, and consistent.

Unfortunately, indicators reflect data systems that were generally not designed for the purposes to which they're now being applied. For one, they typically measure deficits—mortality, morbidity, risk, and so on, which are all negative indicators. Few positive indicators are part of the traditional set. This legacy reflects an earlier era's priority of reducing death and disease. Thus, we typically track the number of pregnant teens, rather than the number who do not become pregnant; the rate of child abuse, rather than the rate of children receiving love and support. But negative indicators are poor guides for the direction we'd like to go. Even if many indicators remain negative, we can at least place negative indicators within a broader context of positive outcomes.

A further handicap is that social indicators are generally not produced on a timely basis (with the exception of certain economic indicators). Nor are most readily available indicators collected and reported at a geographic scale that is small enough to be meaningful for communities. Finally, for some of the outcomes most widely adopted ("All Children Are Ready for School," for instance), almost no indicators are generally accepted as valid.

The development of "good" indicators is often a "bootstrapping" operation. Flawed indicators draw attention and criticism, leading to pressure to improve the indicators (e.g., by enhancing data quality, timeliness, language, etc.). Still, beginning the process, even with crude measures, is preferable to not beginning at all.<sup>7</sup>

Increasingly, communities across the nation are developing indicators of community assets, such as local organizations, local resources, and local talent.<sup>8</sup> Another source of positive community-based indicators is developmental assets of youth.<sup>9</sup> As we've already remarked, adolescents in our society are victims of negative stereotypes and have become scapegoats for a host of societal failings that clearly have much broader responsibility. Typical indicators for teenagers highlight the risks we want them to avoid: alcohol and drug use, sex and pregnancy, and violence. The "positive youth development" approach counters that preoccupation with risk avoidance with a positive approach, which identifies factors in young people's lives that enable them to thrive.

Even within the constraints of traditional data systems, we can create indicators that "add value"—i.e., that go beyond what is typical. For example, numbers of registered voters and numbers of actual voters are readily available. A "voter turnout" indicator typically reports on the percentage of those registered who actually vote. A "value-added" alternative is to report on actual voters as a proportion of the voting-eligible population. Such an indicator is a more comprehensive measure of democratic participation.

Another "added-value" approach is to combine two or more measures for a more meaningful indicator. For example, one can count the number of available "slots" for child care in a community—a typical "capacity" measure. One can also estimate the need for child care from population parameters, such as the proportion of families with young children and working parents. Combined as "percentage met need for child care," the resulting indicator is a richer measure of the success of a community in supporting children and parents than either measure is singly.

We know that risk factors have a cumulative effect that is not simply additive. (Actually, the same is true of protective factors.) Multiple co-occurring risks spell a much greater likelihood of damaging outcomes. Yet, to date, few well-established measures of multiple risks (or assets) exist. One example, which was introduced by



the national KIDS COUNT project sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), is “new families at risk.” This indicator is defined as families experiencing a first birth where the mother is a teenager, unmarried, and without a high school diploma. Data published by KIDS COUNT showed that such families were 10 times more likely to live in poverty than families with none of these three risk factors. Clearly, this relatively small group is critically important for targeting interventions. Unfortunately, AECF could only obtain these tabulations from the National Center for Health Statistics on a one-time basis.

In evaluating community progress toward outcomes, two kinds of indicator data are required for purposes of comparison. One relates to absolute standing (say, relative to a state average); the other relates to whether the community is getting better or worse. Even though some communities are chronically at the top or bottom of the heap, relative to the state average, their standing can be quite independent from the direction of recent change. So value is gained in measuring both.

#### *An Indicator Story*

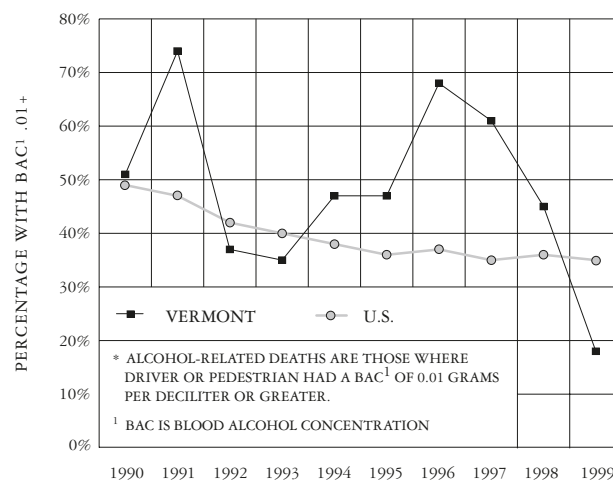
Here’s what can happen when concerted effort is focused on an indicator.

Each year, Vermont’s Agency of Human Services would cite the success stories represented by improving indicators, such as rates of child abuse and teen pregnancy. For several years running, we’d also highlight a major “black eye”—alcohol-related crash deaths involving teens. In 1996 and 1997, Vermont was ranked as the *worst* state in the nation in the proportion of teen crash deaths that involved alcohol. In those years, alcohol figured in about two-thirds of those deaths and, each year throughout the 1990s, accounted for at least a third of those deaths.

With the 1999 statistics released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, we were able to point to a decline in this percentage for three years straight. The 1999 figure (18 percent) was the lowest on record, and Vermont was *second-best* (behind Hawaii) in the nation.

We need to be cautious here, because the annual numbers are so small that a few crashes more or less can have a big impact on the rates. Nevertheless, we tend to credit this most recent trend to the widespread conversation that this indicator sparked across the state. The media picked it up, and many communities focused on prevention activities. In general, the message was, “*We’ve got our eye on this one.*” And that seems to be paying off.

TEEN ALCOHOL-RELATED\* MOTOR VEHICLE CRASH DEATHS — AGES 15–20



\* ALCOHOL-RELATED DEATHS ARE THOSE WHERE DRIVER OR PEDESTRIAN HAD A BAC<sup>1</sup> OF 0.01 GRAMS PER DECILITER OR GREATER.  
<sup>1</sup> BAC IS BLOOD ALCOHOL CONCENTRATION

Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Fatality Analysis Reporting System.

Following is the story behind the story...

In the winter and spring of 1999, a series of these deaths occurred. Every week seemed to bring another tragic case of teens dying on the roads. The previous year, the gubernatorial campaign featured some of these tragedies occasioned by drinking-and-driving. The Governor’s “State of the State” address highlighted the issue again, and families of drunk-driving victims were invited guests.

The following legislative session featured several bills introduced to address the drinking-and-driving problem. During this session, the Governor held a press conference to highlight alcohol-related crash deaths of teens. Indicator data charted through 1997 were made



available. The data received considerable press attention because, in 3 of the previous 8 years, Vermont had the worst record on this indicator among the 50 states.

At about the same time, the Department of Transportation was pushing a slate of legislative changes that would tighten up the use of automobiles by teenagers. The Department of Public Safety was pushing for tougher penalties for drinking-and-driving. The Governor was also increasing the frequency and intensity of his public statements on the issue.

young teens were killed when they tried to pass another car on a curve in a no-passing zone. In one of the worst cases, two were killed when a carload of teens pulled out, without looking, in front of a fully loaded log truck. Indeed, several high-profile deaths were attributed to drinking-and-driving, but the majority of deaths were actually attributable to a lack of plain old common sense and the faulty judgment of new drivers.

These findings received considerable press attention, with Chris Graff devoting several columns to the subject.

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**In evaluating community progress toward outcomes, two kinds of indicator data are required for purposes of comparison. One relates to absolute standing (say, relative to a state average); the other relates to whether the community is getting better or worse.**

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Around this time, Con received a call from Chris Graff, the long-time Vermont Bureau Chief of the Associated Press, who had developed an interest in this story. He had a teenage son and, like most parents, was worried about this issue. He and Con had a lengthy chat. A couple of days later, Con called him back to ask if the clipping files could be easily accessed and, if so, could he get a copy of each story on teen auto-crash deaths over the past two years. Chris said yes, the files were accessible, and, yes, he would send Con a package immediately.

Con's intention was to read every clipping systematically to assess if any patterns appeared. Con could have had internal staff review the official records instead, but he deliberately chose to rely on media accounts. In these kinds of cases, the press reports often have fuller information than official records. What emerged from Con's review was remarkable. Over the past two years, 17 deaths of 16- and 17-year-olds resulted from auto crashes but, interestingly, just 6 of the deaths were associated with alcohol. Another fact emerged from the review. In almost every death, the teen driver had a serious lapse of judgment.

In one case, a 16-year-old was killed during the first snow of the season. This teen had never driven in snow before and was going too fast. In another case, two

A common purpose of stopping these deaths clearly engaged the public. The legislature, which in the past had resisted tightening up—even incrementally—the rules for teen drivers, acted decisively by passing a graduated-licensing bill and stiffening sanctions for under-age possession of beer. The Governor and the schools continued the drumbeat, stressing the importance of engaging students on the drinking-and-driving issue. Many communities acted directly to intercept and break up teen drinking parties. The state police adopted more aggressive enforcement. The state's attorneys followed through with more consistent referrals to the courts. A new, federally funded community-based prevention initiative got started in many communities. And the Agency of Human Services kept publishing the data.

In sum, the tragic deaths, increased media coverage, and political response galvanized fuller engagement on the issue by many stakeholders over several years. The sequel to this story, as demonstrated by the chart on the previous page, was that Vermont's ranking on this indicator over a period of three years went from worst in the nation to second best.

Along with incremental material resources, the critical factor was human energy focused on the issue and

growing steadily over several years. Finally, most people involved in related policy and practice were engaged around the common purpose of keeping their teens alive. When the communities weighed in—with everything from focus groups to intervening in teen parties that featured drinking—the energy of people throughout the state was aligned. Such is the power of indicators.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Osborne, D., and Gaebler, T.A., *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit Is Transforming the Public Sector* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992).
2. Covey, Stephen R., *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989).
3. Osborne and Gaebler, op. cit.
4. See Appendix F for a dialogue between Con Hogan and Gary Stangler.
5. Osborne and Gaebler, op. cit.
6. For an expanded outcomes-and-indicator sampling, see Appendix A.
7. Osborne and Gaebler, op. cit.
8. The work of John McKnight and his colleagues promotes a view of community assets that includes grassroots efforts to map the location not only of institutions (libraries, parks, schools), but also of individuals with particular skills (carpentry, accounting) as well as voluntary associations (block organizations, bridge clubs) that contribute value to neighborhoods. McKnight and others contrast this approach with the traditional “needs” assessment, which catalogs a community’s deficits and reinforces a sense of powerlessness.
9. Search Institute of Minneapolis promotes a framework of 40 assets based on developmental research. Hundreds of communities across the country have used the Search Institute’s questionnaire on each of the 40 assets in middle- and high-school-aged youth. The survey measures a community’s current capacity to support young people. Results in these communities have led to some important conversations about the well-being of youth and illustrate how positive indicators can change the lens through which we view others.

## Partners in Common Purpose

All human change, for good or bad, devolves from human relationships. Policies, programs, and monies all pale next to the power of other human beings to influence our individual and collective development. The power of human relationships can override organizational structures, processes, and systems.

Relationships are significant throughout our life span. From an infant's attachments to parents, to peer relations in childhood, to mentoring relationships in adolescence, to strong marriages in adulthood, the evidence is overwhelming: Close, caring, and enduring relationships with other people nurture our physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

**Family and Community Relationships** Many studies have shown how the strong attachment between a mother and infant sets the stage for positive human development. The important role played by our best teachers, the ones who connect with us emotionally, is also well documented. The close bond with a sibling, a strong family unity, a mentor at the workplace, the connection between therapist and client are additional examples of the role that relationships play in positive human change.

A focus on outcomes helps to keep the value of relationships at center stage. Some outcomes explicitly recognize our interconnectedness and interdependence, such as "Children Live in Stable, Supported Families," or "Families Live in Safe, Supportive Communities."

That relationships are essential in outcomes work shouldn't be a surprise. We hear, for instance, that "it's people, not programs" that make the difference. Still, for human relationships to grow and flourish, programs must provide enough flexibility for people to be creative. One characteristic shared by all successful

programs is the degree to which positive human relationships are the centerpiece. Successful programs often depend for their success on staff who understand the importance of high-quality relationships. Clearly, effective mentors, social workers, or spiritual advisors make a difference in people's lives.

**A Dance** One of the more interesting metaphors for human relationships comes from a paper by a Welshman, Michael Reilly.<sup>1</sup> His paper examines the connections among beliefs, perceptions, expectations, and emotions. These variables play out in interpersonal and organizational dynamics. Reilly proposes that a fuller understanding of these variables—their development within us and their mutual interplay—can deepen our relationships with one another. This dimension may well be the most important for achieving the outcomes of well-being for the children and families within our communities.

*... there is a world of difference between knowing the steps of the dance and being able to dance those steps. To dance gracefully and elegantly is to be the steps and to dance with your whole body. It is to flow with the movements in such a way that familiarity with the meaning of the dance is apparent. To create the meaning of the dance requires an act of imagination and wonder. By being aware of, attending to, and appreciating the importance of beliefs, emotions, expectations, and perceptions, we can hold, move, and be flexible with the meaning, of our actions, behaviors, and outcomes. This allows us to flow with the rhythm and to pace and be in rapport with others and ourselves. To dance the music, responding to the notes and the spaces in between the notes, is what is asked for.*

*To do this we need to listen and bear, to watch and see, to care and act, with humility, respect, trust, openness, and compassion. May we learn to do this with elegance and grace for the sake of the families we strive to serve and for our own sake.*

Reilly's paper also reflects the value of emotion in human well-being.

*It is emotions that move us, indeed we say, "that was moving" or "I was moved by that." It is intriguing that we can still talk about motivation without talking about emotion ...*

*One of the realities of interpersonal and organizational dynamics is that we do not give sufficient attention to the contagious quality of emotions. Emotions are contagious. We pick up on and are affected by the emotional states of others. When we are with a group of people who are happy, the likelihood that we will laugh and become happy is increased. Equally, when we are with people who are sad and upset, the likelihood is that we will become sad and upset. Working with people, we can pick up and act out their emotions and problems. Organizations can mirror what is happening within the lives of those people who are being served. Organizations, or those parts of organizations dealing with particular issues, be they to do with poverty, abuse, addiction, learning, violence, can begin to act out some of the issues as if the issue belonged to the organization.*

**When the Corn Don't Grow...** Another telling metaphor for our relationships with children comes from a letter to the editor:<sup>2</sup>

*... all children deserve to be taught by someone who maintains high expectations for their learning potential, and ... when children don't learn, we need to look to the teaching rather than to the child. A parent in rural Louisiana once said to me, "When the corn don't grow, we don't say what's wrong with the corn, we ask if it rained enough, if the soil was good, or if we planted at the right time. How come y'all always trying to figure out what's wrong with our kids?"*

When our children don't learn, our first instinct is to blame them, unfortunately. If we were to apply the farmer's common sense to why our children don't succeed, we would look at the quality of their early relationships, at the availability and richness of initial experiences, and at the number of important attachments maintained throughout their school years. We would look at the child's eating and sleeping patterns and the child's opportunities for study and play. All in all, we would look at the social "climate."

When it comes to our children, we need to think more like farmers "when the corn don't grow."

**Key Partnerships** Not all relationships are based on family or community ties. Common purpose is what attracts and sustains partnerships among diverse organizations. When an organization casts itself as one which "steers" rather than "rows,"<sup>3</sup> the common-purpose agenda naturally attracts partners. Promoting an outcome that transcends any single organization's mandate or capacity opens the door for partners eager to work with others toward the same goal. This attraction holds true at state, regional, and local levels and for both public and private sectors. Actually, key partners will also come from a "third sector," that is, partners in nonprofit or volunteer organizations with social goals of their own not linked to self-interest.

One obvious advantage of having new partners working together is that the process preempts many long-standing, almost reflexive, organizational wars over "turf." The bigger the players, the more resolutely they cling to turf. Issues of power and control—or who owns what part of the "machinery" and who should best run it—often parallel issues of money. These divisions are all too present in agencies that consider themselves independent entities. The stronger the common purpose across agencies or organizations, the more likely their focus will be on how to improve the outcomes together, rather than on issues of power and control.

When agencies try working together for the first time without common purpose, they often end up repeating the negative behaviors they are trying to avoid. Cooperation without common purpose is hardly better than no cooperation at all. In fact, lack of common purpose can exacerbate problems between organizations. Whenever issues of turf arise, the solution lies in rearticulating common purpose and in revisiting the outcomes and indicators that chart this common purpose.

Common purpose—at every turn—can pull disparate organizations together and reduce the turf battles to which we've become accustomed. When organizations monitor the same things and their programs contribute

to the same outcomes, their efforts are complementary rather than combative. Organizations that focus their human energy on the same results naturally work more closely together, coordinating their resources instead of fighting over them.

In the next chapter, examples of partnerships with human services agencies illustrate how Reilly’s “dance relationship” is a useful metaphor for creating common-purpose outcomes with diverse partners—such as departments of education, economic development organizations, health care systems, and universities. As Reilly said of his paper, we also can say;

*This ... is an invitation to dance with some of the factors that inform our sense of self, our stories, our decisions, actions, and behaviors and to be aware of the dance that these factors have with themselves. To explore such dancing requires that we go below the visible and surface world of actions.*

## Chapter 4:

### TRANSFORMING AGENCIES

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Well-articulated outcomes can generate benefits for all participants. When multiple agencies commit to such outcomes, each benefits from that common purpose. A new spirit begins to develop: “*We are all in this together ... We can all help achieve this outcome.*” Over time, this spirit is strengthened as progress becomes evident on specific indicators.

At the core of the motivating systems of organizations is the ritual of taking credit. Particularly in government, where monetary rewards are generally a weak incentive, receiving widespread, public credit is by far the most powerful incentive available.

We recall several press conferences in Vermont where the Governor called together service agencies, non-profit organizations, and citizens who had contributed to reducing child abuse. As the Governor gave credit to the group and to each individually, a simple chart behind them showed the substantial reduction in the state’s child abuse rate over a four-year period. The television cameras had an effective visual to focus upon, and those being honored glowed in acceptance of due credit.

Articulating common purpose also benefits government. The public message that government tries to impart becomes stronger and clearer as a result. Describing the work of government in language that people use in their daily lives draws them into the process of tracking progress.

In the early years of Vermont’s “Success by Six” initiative, the media and the general public began to understand the meaning of that succinct outcome statement. They also began to understand its priority for state and local governments. The public’s understanding and government’s priority resulted in everyone reflecting on the contribution they could make. Child care providers who read to young children or the public health agencies that reduce lead poisoning could take credit for some contribution to the outcome. “Success by Six” was an effective rallying point.

**Beyond Mission and Tradition** The intent of an outcome’s meaning goes beyond organizational “mission.” Most mission statements focus on the internal work of an agency, while occasionally expressing ideals so abstract as to be meaningless. But “All Children Are Ready for School” or “All Babies Are Born Healthy” speak to results well beyond the mission or tradition of an agency. Outcomes expressed so clearly connect with the public’s personal concerns.

A new appreciation for the energy and assets in our communities emerges when service agencies adopt outcomes thinking. Letting go of traditional frames of reference can release untapped energies for the indicator or outcome at hand. When an agency takes inventory of

its assets and recognizes its potential contributions, the power of possibility becomes vivid.

Instead of focusing solely on dropout prevention *programs*, for example, service agencies begin to think in particularized ways toward integrated *goals*. They begin to see how each agency and each employee can contribute to reducing the number of dropouts. Likewise, instead of the usual response of throwing money at a problem, more creative—and often low cost—ideas surface when agencies start thinking about themselves as resources. Such empowerment is often more effective than traditional solutions.

Day-to-day conversations about the nature of human services work and the prospects that staff envision begin to shift from being about *programs* to being about *results*. That shift connects our jobs to our hearts. Such a shift does not occur overnight; however, once it begins, the difference becomes clear to all. Discussions become connected to specific well-being outcomes for the people served, and are no longer solely focused on the machinery of service work.

agencies become aligned by subtle but perceptible degrees. As an integrated view of their work begins to emerge, each agency—even if only through a minority of employees—begins to find particular ways to contribute to this common purpose.

This connection between an agency’s activity and a broader result represents a straightforward way of thinking. Such is the power of outcomes.

This cross-agency approach to training also avoids the frequent temptation in government to “reorganize,” which typically saps vital energy from the system. Finding common purpose can turn down the heat that results when employees perceive a threat from reorganization for reorganization’s sake. This lesson may be difficult for human services staff to absorb. They have been through so many efforts that purport to reorganize their work. Most of these efforts had insufficient focus on common purpose to justify the reorganization. Thus, employees tend to greet such reorganization efforts with great weariness and skepticism. Essentially, they’re unused to the idea that form really does follow function.

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**This connection between an agency’s activity and a broader result represents a straightforward way of thinking. Such is the power of outcomes.**

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**Training for Tomorrow** Training programs across agencies can use outcomes as unifying themes. Usually, such programs are conducted by individual agencies for the benefit of their own employees; rarely does the content connect to the efforts of other agencies. However, cross-agency training in outcomes work can bring employees in a variety of roles together around common purpose, creating important linkages for interrelated outcomes and indicators.

At first, common training elements may not be obvious for organizational cultures as disparate as child protection, public health, and corrections. But by posing a common purpose that each agency can support, cross-training can begin to foster a more interdependent view. Over time, organizational cultures of very different

The ideal way to think about function is to identify the common purpose.

### **Using the Outcomes Question**

*What can you do?* is such a simple question, but we don’t often pose it. Yet, when asked systematically among agencies, this fundamental outcomes question can focus their work in specific ways. When we use outcomes and indicators in our day-to-day thinking, such a question brings a cohesion and coherence to our efforts. The question becomes an important vehicle for transmitting shared values across different and complex agencies. This strategy takes on even more meaning when the outcome we are trying to change is embedded in the question. For example, “What can you or your



agency do to contribute to ‘All Children Are Ready for School?’”

At Vermont’s Agency of Human Services, that question was asked over and over throughout the 1990s:

- Annual evaluations centered on that question, across the departments of public health, mental health, child welfare, public welfare, child support, Medicaid, aging and disabilities, and corrections;
- All agency employees were asked how their work contributed to that outcome;
- Local collaboratives were asked the question as part of their grant applications;
- Health care systems, the state Department of Education, and the University of Vermont were asked that question by lawmakers in their annual reports to the legislature; and
- Departments were asked the question during budget appropriation hearings.

Over time, that question resulted in greater elaboration and clarity about everyone’s possible contributions. The line of sight between that outcome and each department’s programmatic efforts became clearer. Connections between outcomes and their indicators became clearer, and connections among the various components of agency work became clearer. Individuals and agencies could see the impact of their work in a more integrated way. Regular reporting on indicators became the feedback system for assessing whether things were getting better or worse. Clearly, the question began to have an impact on our common culture.

### **A Call to Action**

“*We want to reduce teen pregnancies*” was a call heard from many directions during the mid-1990s. That issue became one of several that helped drive the politics of the 1996 federal welfare reform legislation. The reduction in teen pregnancy was associated with a combination of targeted public health messages, specific prevention programs, and access to health clinics designed for the special needs of teenagers. The discus-

sion generally centered around specific programs, some already established and some innovative. What was nearly overlooked, however, were the substantial contributions that other programs, agencies, and individuals could make—if only they were challenged to do so.

For example, the field of child protection is not usually associated with reducing teen pregnancies. However, simply asking the question “*What can the child protection agency do to contribute to reducing teen pregnancies?*” opens up possibilities. The resulting dynamics can enhance the total effort. When child protection staff perceive a contribution they can make to another field of service, their work achieves a higher purpose. Collegial relationships with staff in other disciplines also develop. If those child protection workers and their agency publicly receive some credit for helping reduce teen pregnancy rates, then we significantly enhance the spirit of working together for a common purpose. For this cooperation to happen more often, we need regularly to ask how different agencies and their personnel can contribute to an outcome or indicator.

**Partnerships for Child Welfare** A systematic review of what an outcomes approach can offer particular human services programs is not possible here. However, the field of child welfare deserves a little special attention.

Formal efforts to deal with the problems of wayward, abused, and neglected children in the United States have been under way for over 200 years. The “Little Wanderers” program in Boston, for example, was established in 1799. Other services evolved through various phases from institutionalization to foster care, to prevention, and lately to strategies concerned with child welfare in general. In the last decades, the work of Casey Family Services, on the East Coast, and the Casey Family Program, on the West Coast, have shown the potential for improving the lives of children and, more recently, of families and communities.

Notwithstanding these and other bright lights, the state of public child welfare agencies ranges from fair to dismal. Underfunding, poor morale, lagging energy,



and chronic criticism by the media and political officials are the norm. Throughout the nation, these agencies have come under the scrutiny, and sometimes the control, of the courts. Often, as ways are sought to improve services for children, the institutional and legislative response focuses narrowly on safety. Neglected are the child welfare system's broader responsibilities for early intervention and prevention, which include family and community development. Precisely the opposite ought to be occurring.

Child welfare systems should connect in every way possible to a wider system of care and should base their work more on prevention and child/family development. Without these efforts, the drive for program accountability will miss important opportunities to bring a broader perspective and, ultimately, a greater satisfaction to this work.

Communities in places as varied as New Zealand and New Brunswick are promoting and succeeding with new child welfare practices. However, these efforts and other enlightened work in the United States (including that funded by foundations) affect only a small number of families and children.

Specifically, child protection agencies should reach out to education systems, family development centers, mental health, and public health agencies as partners in common purpose. "All Babies Are Born Healthy" is as much an issue for child welfare as for public health agencies. "All Children Are Ready for School" is as deep a concern for child protection agencies as it is for family centers and educational systems. By adopting a broader view of their responsibilities, professionals in all fields would quickly realize a more powerful role for themselves.

Greater alignment creates greater synergy, which leads to greater success.

**Fishing for Common Ground** The value of finding common ground is by no means limited to the human services field. In 1998, Montana native Al Elser was our revered "down-home" Commissioner of Vermont's Department of Fish and Wildlife (part of our Agency of

Natural Resources). Dr. Jan Carney, a physician, was the long-standing Commissioner of the Department of Health (under our Agency of Human Services).

One day, Elser approached Con in the cafeteria, lamenting the budget woes of his department. Revenues for Fish and Wildlife come primarily from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. Because of a long-term demographic shift in Vermont, as in the nation, sales of licenses were slowly but steadily declining. A result was shrinking revenues and, thus, higher prices for licenses. Two weeks prior to Spring fishing season, Elser was particularly disturbed because sales of licenses should have peaked. To make matters worse, the Health Department had just published an advisory on mercury in Vermont waters.

Both departments were doing their job. But for Elser's department, the timing of the mercury warnings couldn't have been worse. Con proposed that he, Elser, and Carney sit down together and see if they could find some common ground. Con made clear to Elser that he would not dispute the science but instead try to find a politically acceptable solution.

As you can imagine, the meeting was tense. In both the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Department of Health, the stakes were high. For Fish and Wildlife, the issue was revenue; for Health, the issue was scientific integrity. The meeting proceeded and, at some point, one of the three (memories are vague here) posed a question that opened up some new thinking. Specifically, "Are there any fish that don't accumulate mercury?" Dr. Carney replied; Yes, some fish don't accumulate mercury. In Vermont, they are known as pan-fish or crappies. That led to another question, "Are there any bodies of water where fish are less likely to accumulate mercury?" Once again, Dr. Carney replied: Yes, mercury tends to accumulate in ponds and lakes, not in streams.

Immediately, all three had the same idea. Why not put together a marketing campaign with the theme "Take your child fishing"? Have the ad include pictures of children, fishing poles, and pan-fish but add a clear

note that no fish should be taken from the Harriman Reservoir, and pregnant women should not eat walleye from Lake Champlain.

Both department heads left happy. They had found common ground that both departments could support, namely, the value of taking children fishing. Elser now had a way to sell more fishing licenses and increase revenue for his department. Carney could still deliver the important public health message about mercury. And both departments contributed to a larger common purpose.

### **How Technology Will Help Agencies Change**

Bureaucratic agencies generally have a hard time changing. Bureaucrats themselves can be barriers to progress toward any new way of thinking. To understand the possibilities for significant change, we must first reflect on the essential purpose of bureaucracies. Bureaucracies exist, by and large, to centralize administrative power. Accordingly, bureaucrats have an excessive concern for official routine. For decades, the only way we had to circulate information was by assigning people to specific tasks.

More than half of all Americans now either own or have access to a personal computer. As our information technology has developed along with our computing ability, anyone with access to a computer can access information directly without going through a bureaucracy. Where information was once kept by organizations, that information is now readily available to anyone who seeks it. No more intermediary officials, request forms, or administrative delays exist between us and what we want to know. Over time, governmental organizations will continue to flatten their hierarchical framework. As the user-friendliness of computers increases and their price decreases, access to more information for more people will be the norm.

What are the implications of such change? One is that information, once obtainable only through people in government, will steadily become available directly to consumers. Another is that society will have less need for government agencies. This process is already well

under way. Technology has already profoundly affected the work of government. These impacts will continue, in part, because of government's resistance to change.

For one, e-mail has taken hold in government departments and nonprofit organizations across the country, although still not to the degree as in the private sector. The closer to real time that e-mail communication becomes, the more communities of interest will emerge across all public sectors among people who have never communicated this way before.

Second, the speed of this communication is accelerating opportunities for new ideas and new ways of thinking. As voice recognition technology becomes common over the next five years, more people will join the technology revolution who now cannot manage a keyboard, including disabled people.

Because the inherent tendency of these developments is to cross traditional boundaries, information will naturally break down old categorical perspectives. Essentially, the collective discussion on all issues will move to a higher level, involving more and more people who have something to contribute. In the human services field, we see technology playing a very important role in promoting outcomes thinking in countless practical ways. Half the employees in Vermont's Agency of Human Services first learned about outcomes thinking from a weekly report to the Governor, also posted to the agency's intranet (minus the confidential material). One could just as well send the same to each legislator, to selected committee chairs, and to contractors. Thus, electronic communication can begin to change the culture of an entire agency.

More significant for human services work will be the speed at which data are transmitted and available. Outcomes work requires timely feedback on indicator data. The real-time demand for data is now pushing old systems to respond more quickly. As turnaround continues to improve, indicator data will gain in power to effect change. Clearly, in outcomes work, technology can play a lead role.

# Chapter 5:

## CONNECTING WITH BUSINESS

Finding common purpose may be no easier in a business enterprise than in a government agency. However, business people are generally action oriented and positive about their work. And they are usually natural problem solvers. Consequently, the private sector may have much to teach the public sector about how to achieve outcomes.

Take a cash flow problem. Instead of immediately resorting to the banks, a company's key managers would brainstorm the problem and the steps needed to remedy it. For example, the receivables department might accelerate collection efforts, the payables department could extend disbursements, the inventory division could delay purchasing, the marketing division could run a sale on current inventory, and the planning division could defer capital expenditures. Soon enough, cash levels would improve.

One of the underbellies of the human services world is that many of us were raised with a problem-oriented perspective. As professionals, we tend to focus on the needs of people rather than on their capacities. No surprise then that business people are some of our severest critics. An outcomes approach could change that. An outcomes-and-indicators framework has an implicit action orientation. Just as regular reporting of cash levels can initiate corrective action, reporting lower-than-expected immunization rates, for example, is also a call to action.

We need to transfer some of that positive, focused energy of business to our own work. Indeed, many of the conceptual approaches of the private sector could invigorate human services work.

So what precisely is different about a business style of work?

### **The Common Purpose of Business—**

**Profitability** By law, the purpose of corporations and businesses is to maximize profits for the benefit of shareholders, who “own” the business. Over many years, accounting practices have developed to track that progress, such as profit-and-loss statements, balance sheets, inventory schedules, payables and receivables, and charts of accounts. This common language allows reasonable comparisons among businesses.

The constant search for profit determines the rhythm of business according to monthly timetables. Most well-run businesses produce financial reports by the 10th working day following the close of each monthly operating cycle. The profit (or loss) on a company's balance sheet provides a fundamental measure of the company's health. Profit also allows strategic investment in systems (both hardware and software), inventory, and marketing—each of which contributes to an enhanced tax base.

Different groups realize profit in different ways. Shareholders profit by receiving dividends or an increased return on their investment when they sell their shares. Customers profit by receiving higher quality products, more responsive service, and more competitive pricing. Employees profit by receiving higher compensation or bonuses, opportunities for profit sharing, better health care, and other benefits—all of which contribute to a higher standard of living. Profitability, rather than being exclusive to the business community, applies to all of us.

This perspective offers some striking, yet underdeveloped, parallels to human services agencies. If the fundamental purpose of a business is to improve its profitability for shareholders, then the parallel purpose for human services is to improve the well-being of people and communities.

An important factor in maintaining strong communities is a strong local economy. Stronger economic well-being is associated with fewer costly social problems. As business knows, higher levels of disposable income lead to increased consumer spending, thereby strengthening the attachment of a business as employer and

seller to the larger community. However, a prevalent myth is that “economic” development has to precede “social” development. In fact, the reverse is more often true. A healthy work ethic, caring neighbors, a safe and family-friendly community, and other intangible quality-of-life factors attract economic opportunity.<sup>3</sup> Such is the power of outcomes.

We are all shareholders in the well-being of children and families, so any demonstrable improvement in well-being improves the lives of all. For example, “fewer teen pregnancies” is one indicator of healthy communities. Because teen pregnancies extract a high social cost, the benefits from fewer teen pregnancies accrue not only to teens but also to families, educators, and other community members.

corporate hierarchy is less prevalent these days. More often, team building, sharing responsibility, and rewarding initiative are common practices. This spirit of working together toward common ends is at the center of business success but is often difficult for the public sector to achieve.

Establishing common purpose for our work is a way to begin. Our social systems work best when people find ways to discuss, ponder, challenge each other, and work together. With a business lens, we could view these relationships as “social capital.” If we are serious about improving the well-being of communities and families, then we must commit to developing new relationships with the business community in particular. Business leaders, especially, represent points of leverage. The

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**We are all shareholders in the well-being of children and families, so any demonstrable improvement in well-being improves the lives of all.**

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Improving indicators and outcomes for children and families is equivalent to improving a company’s fiscal health. Well-being is the counterpart in the human services world to profitability in the business world.

**Learning From Successful Business Principles** The phrase “entrepreneurial government” suggests important points of connection between successful business practice and good government. An outcomes approach to public service offers an opportunity to take advantage of these connections. For human services to benefit from this perspective, however, we need to understand the language and culture of business.

Following are some commonsense ways we can mirror successful business practice.

**Spend Time Building Relationships** Just as they are for families and communities, human relationships are the fuel for successful business. The idea of doing business on the golf course may be a cliché, but it’s true. Business people spend time with each other. They learn about each other’s work. The traditional

impact of developing mutually respectful relationships cannot be overstated. (See Appendix B for suggestions on “What Business Leaders Can Do.”)

**Cultivate the Language of Business** Clarity of message and purpose can set the foundation for new relationships with the business community. Government gobbledegook and bureaucratic complexity have ruined many well-meaning efforts at collaboration. A new simplicity of language could change that. Clarity of message is something the business community respects. The simple, declarative statements of outcomes and indicators project an image that is much more closely allied with business’s own approach.

Communicating with the business culture also requires some familiarity with basic financial concepts and terms. Speaking in terms of cost–benefit, cost savings, cost avoidance, and bottom line sets a tone that makes more productive communication possible. A common language can contribute to stronger common purpose. Human services may discover that cultivating language more familiar to the business community is an effective

bridge. Casting an idea as a “cost-neutral proposition,” for example, is language that business understands.

**Target Your Markets Well** Business thrives on targeted marketing techniques—whether the targets are geographic areas, demographic groups, or special interests. Market profiles, appropriate to specific products, are used to hone customer lists and promotional efforts. Brand names and corporate logos, styled to create a certain image, are used to advance a company’s standing in the public mind. Marketing cycles range from the immediate, such as a Web-based product ad, to a broader strategy, such as seasonal sales or annual promotions. These rhythms are an important aspect of a business’s ability to forecast its production cycles and quarterly dividends.

Government agencies need to develop more direct parallels to this kind of marketing. Targeted marketing strategies are generally applicable to human services. Policymakers might try discussing human services goals with business representatives in terms of a targeted demographic, such as pregnant teens. Marketing cycles could also be effectively applied to outcomes, indicators, and their associated accountability systems.

**Inventory Your Assets** Businesses have a well-developed process for analyzing their assets in order to reveal new opportunities. Over time, such opportunities accumulate and serve as a basis for strategic improvement. For example, many mergers and acquisitions are driven by seeing the potential that could result from combining complementary assets.

Human services could model this behavior by beginning to analyze the opportunities inherent in communities rather than simply their needs. A needs-based approach, over time, unwittingly results in a longer litany of problems, ever-escalating costs, competing advocacy efforts, and overwhelmed service workers. The work of John McKnight and colleagues<sup>4</sup> has focused attention on the wealth of “hidden” resources available in public facilities, voluntary associations, and the talents and skills of individuals. In addition, the Search Institute of Minneapolis<sup>5</sup> has pioneered work in

identifying “developmental assets” of youth, their families, and their communities. Taking inventory of our assets can also provide a real boost to community spirit.

**Look for Connections** Businesses regularly undertake strategic analyses of their customers, searching for the buying habits or unmet needs that would suggest new marketing opportunities. The most successful business people have always seen connections among apparently disparate elements. It comes from “thinking outside the box.”

A more categorical approach has dominated human services. We have organized our work into categories that undo the connections and the continuity that are inherent in the human condition. Common-purpose outcomes promote an environment where new connections and relationships can flourish. The number of permutations of those relationships grows geometrically as the breadth of an outcome increases. If the outcomes-and-indicators framework is sufficiently broad to engage a variety of organizations and individuals, new insights emerge as connections are made within the work and among the people. And these connections create problem-solving opportunities.

**Plan the Future** Business highly values the ability to predict. Predictability is worth money. With the right kind of planning based on market research, new opportunities emerge with enough lead time for a business to act strategically. The results are new sources of revenue. Business managers use balance sheets and profit-and-loss statements not only to help organize information but also to improve predictability.

Among human services agencies and nonprofit community organizations, the rhythm of predictability is underdeveloped. In part, funding levels that change from year to year are to blame. Sometimes budgets aren’t available until the year is well under way. Often, crisis management, rather than a more thoughtful analysis of long-term variables, is what drives the human services agenda. So do elections, legislative vagaries, and the results of media attention. The public sector’s erratic

rhythms make communication difficult with business people, who have a great respect for predictability. A long-term focus on outcomes and indicators would allow human services to build this relationship.

**“Livable Income” Over “Livable Wage”** One of the sure ways to push an emotional hot button with business is to broach a public discussion about a “livable wage.” Business perceives this as an attack on the private sector and withdraws from the conversation. Given that reflexive reaction, a less provocative term is “livable income.” This phrase acknowledges contributions to economic self-sufficiency other than wages alone, which come out of the bottom line of business.

Livable income includes government-funded programs, such as health care, child care, and temporary cash assistance, as well as other measures (e.g., tax policies, workforce training) designed to support the working poor. Framing the issue in these terms reduces the defensiveness that arises when the business community feels expected to provide solutions on its own.

**Use the “80/20” Rule** In the business world, time is money. Businesses regularly use the “80/20” rule: “Time, money, or energy expended on a business proposition should represent 20 percent and the return benefit to the business should represent 80 percent.” Of course, no one measures this exactly, but the concept is useful when deciding how to allocate resources. The rule is important because measurable impacts on results are expected. The 80/20 rule reminds us to spend our energies on activities that have substantial payback.

**Define, Measure, and Report Regularly** The life cycles of business are subject to constant monitoring and measuring. Five-year business plans, one-year budgets, quarterly reports, and monthly income statements comprise the fundamental rhythms of business. These measures are reported daily in the media. Any attempts to communicate better with business must show that we, too, recognize the importance of regularly reporting key measures of our success and of planning strategies based on data (see Chapter 19).

**Connect Closely With the United Way** The United Way provides one of the few bridges between human services and the business community. Business support of the United Way has been solid for many years. On the social services side, United Way is also widely respected. United Way often fills the gaps that government programs cannot address because of restrictive laws and regulations. United Way organizations are an underutilized force for aiding communication and collaboration between government and business.

**Be Patient Change Agents** The public has grown cynical of quick-fix programs, which raise expectations that are rarely realized. The experience of business tells us that at least seven years is needed to effect fundamental change in an organizational culture. In the even more complex fields of human services and community development, the results we want may take a decade to produce. Moreover, the outcomes-and-indicators approach is still a minority voice in the human services field. Even with the increasing acceptance of an outcomes-driven change model, this work will take time and patience.

**Make Partnerships “Win-Win”** Business often feels it’s perceived as a “sugar daddy” with deep pockets, who will always provide when asked. That’s a social service model. Sound business-to-business decisions are based on the “win-win” model. If the human services world is to connect more closely with business, mutually beneficial relationships must be cultivated. For example, when business provides a job-training program for clients of the public sector, the training agenda should include job skills currently in demand by local businesses. That’s a win-win.

**Learn Cost-Benefit Analyses** Cost-benefit analysis is at the center of business decision making. The value of cost-benefit analysis applies to short-term advertising, midterm marketing, and long-term planning. Over time, business develops a tolerance for losing some money on a current basis. They know that further efforts to gain market share will not involve the heavy initial costs of start-up or promotion. This kind



of business arithmetic is developed over a number of years, after which a predictable cycle results from a carefully monitored, calculated accumulation of multi year business data.

Using indicator data as measures of our work, particularly indicators tracked over time, allows us to develop our own cost–benefit analyses. For example, improvement in certain indicators brings associated reductions in demand for services, which are measurable and represent avoided costs and lower demand for taxpayer dollars (see Chapter 16). The more human services gain competence in quantifying their qualitative goals, the more constructively they can interact with business. Cost–benefit analysis offers the public sector one of the more powerful tools to make its case and influence decision makers.

**The Balance Sheet: A Common Tool** The balance sheet of a business is the centerpiece of its work. Its refinement over the years has resulted in an essential tool not only for the enterprise itself but also for anyone interested in that business, including stockholders, consumers, and the general public.

Balance sheets do many things. They represent the relative value of the enterprise at various points in time. They also reflect fundamental changes in the fiscal condition of the enterprise over time, such as the effects of growth, the balance of assets and liabilities, and the infusion of capital. They interact directly with profit-and-loss statements on a monthly and annual basis. A balance sheet can also be measured against itself—every month, every quarter, or every year—as well as against those of other enterprises for comparison.

The rules for constructing balance sheets are well-defined. The basic equation is that *assets* less *liabilities* equals *net worth*.

- The *assets* side of a balance sheet usually includes short-term or liquid assets, longer term assets, and intangible assets.
  - **Short-term assets** are cash, accounts receivable, and other receipts due over a short term.
  - **Longer term assets** are property and equipment, minus depreciation (that is, loss of value over time).
  - **Intangible assets** are usually considered longer term assets, because they are sometimes difficult to quantify (for example, a client list, the experience of a workforce, or the value of a company's brand name in the eyes of consumers).
- The *liabilities* side of a balance sheet includes obligations to others, such as accounts payable, shorter and longer term notes, and the value of orders paid for but not yet filled.

Even though the balance sheet is not a familiar concept in human services, we can borrow some of its elements to measure our own profit-and-loss using outcomes and indicators. The concept of “social capital” in our communities is becoming more familiar. If those in the private sector could view human services work in terms that they understand, then opportunities would increase for mutual engagement around common-purpose outcomes.

Following are some parallels between a business and a human services balance sheet.



Balance Sheet for Business
<i>Short-Term Assets</i>
Cash
Accounts Receivable
Inventory
<i>Long-Term Assets</i>
Property and Equipment
<i>Intangible Assets</i>
Goodwill
Brand Value
Workforce Capacity
Employee Experience
Customer Value
Leadership
<b>Total Assets</b>
<i>Short-Term Liabilities</i>
Accounts Payable
Notes Payable Current
<i>Long-Term Liabilities</i>
Notes
Debt
<b>Total Liabilities</b>
<b>PROFITABILITY OF BUSINESS</b>

Balance Sheet for People
<i>Short-Term Assets</i>
Improved Indicators
Improving Indicators
Universe of Indicators
<i>Long-Term Assets</i>
Outcomes-and-Indicators Framework
<i>Potential Value</i>
Common Purpose
Potential Credibility
Local Service Organizations
Community Involvement
Community Assets
Leadership
<b>Total Known Assets</b>
<i>Short-Term Liabilities</i>
Worsening Indicators
Current Remediation Costs
<i>Long-Term Liabilities</i>
Multiyear Deteriorating Indicators
Accumulated Social Problems
<b>Total Known Liabilities</b>
<b>WELL-BEING OF PEOPLE</b>

#### CASH = IMPROVED INDICATORS

In business, cash is king. Cash creates the freedom to take advantage of opportunities quickly. It is business's most highly valued asset. Cash drives the ratio of assets to liabilities, which reflects a business's ability to pay its bills on time.

Improved indicators are the closest thing to cash in human services. They represent "money in the bank." We can save resources rather than spend them on fixing problems. Short-term improvement on indicators frees up staff and resources (similar to cash in a business) for prevention work.

#### ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE = IMPROVING INDICATORS

Accounts receivable are short-term assets in the form of receipts due, usually over 30 to 90 days. They are an expected source of revenue and often bridge the vagaries of cash flow. Receipt of those assets is scheduled over time, thereby evening out the cash flow of business.

Improving indicators are analogous to accounts receivable as short- to midterm assets about to be realized. As a stream of liquid assets is vital to a business's daily health, indicators improving over the near term are important to human services work. Another way to think about "improving indicators" is "appreciating assets."

## PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT = OUTCOMES-AND-INDICATORS FRAMEWORK

Property and equipment are fixed or structural assets that provide the foundation of an enterprise. They are buildings, machinery, product inventory, and information networks that sustain operations.

In the human services world, an outcomes-and-indicators framework is the structure within which we do our work. Rather than physical structure, the framework is the conceptual architecture of the human services enterprise.

## INTANGIBLE ASSETS = POTENTIAL VALUE

In the world of business, intangible assets are an essential source of value. Intangibles include difficult-to-quantify assets, such as employee motivation and experience, quality of leadership, quality of training, brand loyalty, value of a customer list, and other important “soft” assets. These forms of “goodwill” can be powerful assets.

In human services, intangibles are the potential value of unidentified, untapped energy in the people of our communities. For example, welfare expenditures represent only 3 percent of Vermont’s budget, but relationships that develop between caseworkers and those in need change lives dramatically. Likewise, common purpose mobilizes collective energy.

## ACCOUNTS PAYABLE = WORSENING INDICATORS

Accounts payable and the portion of notes currently due comprise the current liabilities for a business. These liabilities are largely paid for by the current assets of cash and by the accounts receivable.

Worsening indicators are human services’ parallel. When well-being deteriorates, costs incurred are apparent. Just as accounts payable eventually come due, so do costs from negative indicators. Worsening indicators are similar to “depreciating assets.”

## DEBT = ACCUMULATED DEFICIENCIES

Debt is often a major long-term liability on a business balance sheet. Its size and scope affect the near-term profitability and long-term viability of an enterprise. Debt can be overwhelming. The larger its debt-to-worth ratio, the more vulnerable the business.

Social ills that have accumulated over multiple years can also overwhelm any agency’s efforts to improve the well-being of people. Socially corrosive indicators, worsening over the long-term, can have huge costs. They are debt in the truest sense of the word.

## PROFITABILITY = WELL-BEING

The profitability of an enterprise, its equity, net worth, liquidated value, retained earnings, and capitalization—all describe the fiscal health of a business. The basis for calculating the value of the share holdings is a business’s equity—that is, its profitability.

Well-being is the human services analog to business profitability. Certainly, well-being is a product of tangible short- and long-term assets minus current and longer term social liabilities, together with the intangible assets of people and communities.

## Chapter 6:

### HELPING COMMUNITIES RESPOND

*What can you do?* That's the fundamental outcomes question. The responses, of course, are as varied as the perspectives of the ones being asked the question. If we narrow the question, it gets more interesting. *What can you do to improve the well-being of people in your community on a specific outcome?* When that question is asked of various human services agencies, the responses are predictable because of the specific missions of these agencies. However, when that question is asked of communities, their responses are often startlingly fresh.

**Creative Problem Solving** Community response to the fundamental outcomes question represents the creativity of the human spirit as well as the practical sense of small communities. The following scenarios are amalgams of actual cases. Nevertheless, they accurately reflect a unique quality of community life in America. We think that these stories will inspire related possibilities for human relationship and community participation in building well-being.

**The Single-Moms-and-Their-Infants Photo** At the beginning of welfare reform in the mid-1990s, the welfare agency for a 10,000-person community established a self-help group for single mothers and their infants. The intent was to help these moms learn some basics of child rearing, including assurance that doctor's visits, periodic immunizations, and other preventive care were provided. In addition, the self-help group gave the mothers an opportunity to compare notes on child development. By itself, the group was a helpful, low-cost intervention, which naturally contributed to the outcome "Pregnant Women and Young Children Thrive."

As part of their activities one day, one of the mothers suggested that they take a group photo of themselves and their infants. It was prominently displayed in the

welfare office where many of these activities took place. The photograph was a classic: six caring mothers, each holding a one-year-old or toddler. It could represent any group of mothers and their children.

About five years later, the photo was noticed by Con during one of his field tours. He asked to borrow it. Later, he called the director of the community partnership in which the welfare agency was located to inquire about each of the mothers and their children.

Con brought the photograph that year to the state's Senate Appropriations Committee's hearings on the budget. The effectiveness of welfare reform, its complexities, and associated investments had been a matter of considerable debate. At the hearing, Con passed the photograph around the table and proceeded to give a child-by-child and mom-by-mom report on their current status. In sum, every child was doing well, and all were in the early grades of school.

Further, the moms, who had been receiving cash assistance at the time of the photo, represented quite an array of achievements. One mother went on to receive an undergraduate degree from one of the local state colleges. A second remarried and was leading a productive life in a small community. A third received vocational training in heavy-equipment operation and was working for a well-known construction company. Two others joined the workforce and had moved through several job experiences, but each was a step up. The sixth mother, whose childhood had been spent in Russia, re-mastered the Russian language and was teaching it at a local college.

These individual accomplishments left a significant impression on the policymakers. The community's answer to the question "What can you do?" was represented by a simple photograph that hinted at the future possibilities for these young children and their mothers. The answer ultimately had an impact on the state's policies regarding single mothers on welfare.

The lesson here is that even the simplest community actions can have a great impact, both on community members and policymakers.

**Reaping Rewards by Keeping Children Near Home**

In the mid-1990s, one problem facing many Vermont communities was the increasing number of children coming into the custody of the child welfare system. Many of them, for reasons of treatment and stability of placement, were being removed from the community of their parents, siblings, and friends—sometimes even to other states. At this time, the local community partnership featured in this story was also struggling with how to raise monies for preventing out-of-home placements, monies that were (as in most communities) in short supply.

In one of several discussions held between the partnership and the child welfare department, people asked whether the community could have an incentive for

received a modest check. The dollar amounts weren't high for a community of 50,000, but several thousand dollars a year, accumulating over several years, was significant marginal revenue for the partnership. Its ability to use that money flexibly for a variety of prevention purposes was particularly important.

This example illustrates the “focused energy” that can result when a community creatively grapples with outcomes, such as “Children Succeed in School” or “Youth Successfully Transition to Adulthood.” In this case, a bottom-up initiative influenced a long-standing policy between state agencies and community partnerships. The community's efforts resulted not only in a lower cost alternative but also a net-positive gain. Most importantly, an appreciable number of children were

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**The lesson here is that even the simplest community actions can have a great impact, both on community members and policymakers.**

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reducing the number of children being removed from the community. Out of those discussions came calculations on the costs of caring for children outside their communities versus within them.

The approach agreed upon for these comparisons was that the number of children removed from their homes, but retained in the community, would be tracked, with the previous year's data functioning as a baseline. If the number of children placed in their own community increased relative to those placed elsewhere, a net value of the costs avoided by reducing out-of-community placements would be calculated annually. This amount would then be split, 50–50, between the child welfare agency and the community partnership.

The only string attached would be that the monies flowing back to the partnership must be used for prevention efforts, thus contributing to the likelihood that still more children would remain within their own communities.

These calculations have been made now for a number of years and, in several of those years, the partnership

successfully kept in their home communities where positive relationships are more naturally embedded.

**Sending School Nurses on Welcome-Baby Visits**

In some communities, “welcome-baby” visits have become an important early intervention and support strategy for families, regardless of their economic circumstances. This response to the question “What can you do?” is reasonably inexpensive when compared with the high cost of “back-end” services—that is, those required after problems have formed later in life. In Vermont, welcome-baby visits have evolved into highly decentralized, community-driven activities. The nature of the visits varies from place to place, depending on the strengths and weaknesses in each community, which leads to creativity in the delivery of services to parents with infants.

For one, who delivers the service? Usually, a public health nurse provides the home visit. However, other communities have experimented with different providers. In some communities, a cadre of trained volunteers provides the visits on behalf of the community partnership. In

other communities, representatives from Vermont's network of parent-child centers provide the visits.

One community created a home visit program with an interesting twist. The community partnership decided that, if possible, the visitor would be the school nurse. The reasoning was that, in addition to providing the usual benefits of home visits, the school nurse would have a clinical eye for the kinds of child development issues that connect to Vermont's outcome "Children Are Ready for School." This focus sharpened the community's practices around early literacy experiences and, later, the community's thinking about transitions for a family as a child nears that first day of school.

This opportunity is particularly important in households where the parents' own formal education experience was not pleasant. Many parents distrust the educational system, and their reactions are readily transmitted to the children in conscious and unconscious ways. Using the school nurse for those welcome-baby home visits and continuing that connection over several years was an inspired enhancement to a community program.

Again, a community took an already cost-effective program and added a no-cost dimension, which focused its desire for a more effective and friendly intervention with parents and their children. Such ideas flow best, perhaps only, from a local partnership.

**A Cow and Reparative Justice** This story, based on actual events, illustrates how creatively some communities can respond to the fundamental outcomes question.

A small community of 10,000 established a Reparative Justice Panel similar to other citizen panels throughout the state. The concept behind these panels is that people who commit burglary, for example, are taking more than material goods. They are also taking an individual's sense of safety, which is so central to a healthy community. The intent of reparative justice is to "repair" that breach of trust by requiring offenders to give something back to the community. The powers of Vermont's reparative boards are well-defined in law and are confined to ordering direct restitution to victims of

non-violent crime. The board contracts with an offender for meaningful service to the community. In Vermont, a distinguishing characteristic of reparative justice is that, wherever possible, the board establishes a direct connection between the offender and the victim.

In this particular case, a young man driving drunk on a rural road hit a cow that had wandered from pasture. The cow wasn't killed but was obviously injured. The real victim, however, was the dairy farmer who owned the cow.

The young man was charged with driving while intoxicated, and the case was remanded to a reparative board. The board met with the offender after reading the probation and presentencing reports. A board usually also meets with the victim. But leaving the farm to come to a meeting is not easy for a dairy farmer, nor does he typically want to. So, the entire reparative board of five community volunteers, the probation officer, and the offender went to the farm to offer an apology and negotiate restitution.

The entire group met in front of the cow.

Under ordinary circumstances, such injuries as the cow incurred were serious enough to have the cow put down and allow the owner to obtain, at least, the value of the beef. In this case, however, the cow was pregnant, and the potential value of the calf ruled against killing her. Meanwhile, she needed milking. Due to the cow's injuries, she could be milked only if positioned and hobbled in a particular way. But attending to a single cow with special problems within a milking cycle is difficult and time-consuming.

The board, the offender, and the farmer negotiated a settlement. It took over an hour. They calculated the value of the milk cow had the accident not occurred, they calculated the value of the cow as beef, and they calculated the cost of the entire problem to the farmer. After working this all out, they agreed on an amount to be repaid to the farmer by the offender.

Such a settlement could never have originated with a state-administered program. Both the process and the players in this case were local. The opportunities that

exist within a community to create real justice were central to the successful conclusion of this case.

**Ties With the Elderly Help Keep Them Out of Nursing Homes** Another community response to “What can you do?” involved data the state provided and the efforts of local leaders. In this community of 50,000 people, state data showed extraordinarily high occupancy rates in local nursing homes. Perhaps these data could motivate some action, resulting in improved well-being for elders in this community.

The average cost of a year’s stay in a nursing home in this community at the time was \$38,000 per person. Even where the quality of nursing homes is excellent (as here), moving to one is still a last resort for most people. Given the grim statistics of mortality once one enters a nursing home, not only well-being but life itself is at stake.

The data led a local cross-agency team to take a closer look. Its approach was straightforward. The team went to source documents, including case records, to determine what might contribute to the unusually high occupancy rate. Over several months, the team studied case histories and came to a preliminary conclusion. The largest factor was broken bones, especially hip fractures. A broken hip is often the beginning of the end for people in their 70s or 80s. Vermont’s icy winters additionally put our elders at risk.

The team, however, wanted to take its analysis one step further. It went back to the case histories, hoping to determine the leading causes of the hip fractures. By taking this extra step, the team found something quite remarkable. When you get very old, bending down to tie your shoes becomes difficult. The case histories included enough references to untied shoes to suggest that was a probable contributor to falls and fractures.

So what did the community do to lower the rate of broken bones in the elderly?

First, they arranged a response with their local reparative board. As we’ve already indicated, these boards negotiate contracts with offenders to make restitution to the community for their offenses. One such activity

the reparative board could assign was to shovel snow from walkways used by the elderly. Besides the preventive benefit to the elderly, this activity allowed young offenders to reconnect in a positive way with their community, especially its elders.

But a second initiative truly broke new ground in the ways communities solve problems. An important part of the weekly rhythm for many elders living in group quarters is a shopping trip by van to local stores, particularly grocery stores. The no-cost initiative was to train cashiers and baggers at the grocery stores to make a habit of checking the shoes of their elderly customers. If they were untied, the cashier or bagger, usually a high school student, would offer to tie them.

This compassionate act is not only practical but is also a valuable transaction between the old and young, which is rare these days. If just one elderly person avoided a broken bone as a result of this small gesture, then quality of life was preserved for one more person kept out of an expensive institutional setting.

The occupancy rate in the nursing homes of this community did decline. Perhaps acts of shoe tying were not the critical factor. Still, the broader result was a community awareness of all the little things that we can do for each other to make a difference. Such a by-product is central to how communities can change significant outcomes.

**Breaking Into the Repair Business** Once again, the creative power of local problem solving goes far beyond what could have been achieved by a conventional settlement. In this case, a young man had broken into a nicely appointed, late-model van in order to steal some electronic gear. Using a crowbar, he inflicted significant damage.

This young man was also remanded to a reparative board, which calculated the amount of restitution. Earlier in the meeting, the offender indicated that he had skills in auto body repair. Although the victim was not at the meeting, one of the members of the board reminded the others that the victim was himself an auto body repair specialist. The idea occurred to all of them to see



whether the victim would feel comfortable having the offender make the repairs.

In spite of several overtures, the victim made it clear he would not turn over his van to the offender. The board then suggested that perhaps he could work with the offender to repair the damage. To everyone's surprise, the victim agreed, stipulating that he, too, be part of the process and that the work be done according to his standards.

A month or so passed. The victim reported back to the board that the repairs were completed and that the offender had done an excellent job. The victim also indicated that the offender was willing to take direction and had learned some new repair techniques.

The bottom line of the victim's report to the board was that he was impressed enough with the offender's energy, competence, and sincerity that he had helped arrange a job offer to the offender in the auto body repair business. As time passed, the victim and the offender became mutually respecting colleagues.

with books for young children and trade that egg for any book. So instead of taking home only an egg or two, a toddler would also take a book home. If this community hadn't adopted that cross-cutting literacy theme, they wouldn't have thought of connecting the Easter egg hunt with books.

These kinds of ideas can flow from a community, whereas government would get a headache even imagining such things.

Sometimes poor people don't trust schools. Perhaps they never did well in school, so they continue to feel anxious in that setting. As parents, they can project these feelings onto their children. During a welcome-baby visit in the home of one such anxious parent, the visitor had an idea: Why don't we have a party in the school for the toddlers, one to three years old? The intent was that, if the parents could get used to coming to the school, the toddlers would, too. The idea didn't cost much, and a few parents changed their feelings about school.

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**The objective of reconnecting offenders to their communities requires opportunities. And, wherever possible, we benefit from allowing the natural flow of relationships to work on behalf of the common good.**

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The objective of reconnecting offenders to their communities requires opportunities. And, wherever possible, we benefit from allowing the natural flow of *relationships* to work on behalf of the common good. Such is the power of outcomes.

**An Easter Party, a Birthday Party, and More Parties...** We have referred to the town of Barre before. As in many Vermont communities, Barre puts on a Easter egg hunt. Hundreds of children participate dressed up in their Easter outfits.

Recently, the Easter egg hunt was drawn into Barre's communitywide effort around the theme "Learning for Life." This time, community members added a feature to the traditional egg hunt. Each time a child found an egg, he or she could take it over to a long table filled

In another community's home-visiting program, efforts to get moms interested in meeting other moms were aimed at creating a social support network. One of the ideas, which would never occur to a government agency, was to have a community birthday party for all one-year-olds, rich or poor. In addition to all one-year-olds, they invited Con, who was then Secretary of Human Services. They also invited Con's counterpart, the Commissioner of Education. The two went to the birthday party, because they were working closely together on just this kind of creative collaboration. Imagine all the one-year-olds playing in the tapioca pudding, scrawling with crayons, and basically having a great time. If nothing else had happened subsequently, the \$30 or so to sponsor the party was well spent.

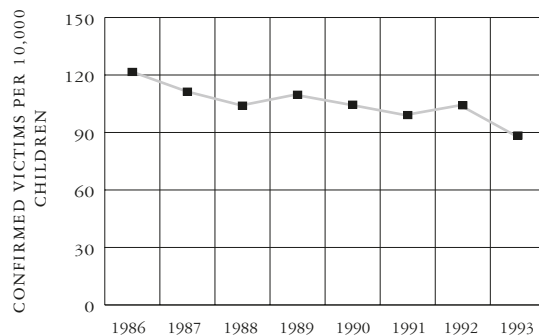
However, when the children were two years old, the moms decided to have another party. Think about the dynamics of that. A whole new set of mothers now know each other and know each other's children, which would not have happened without that initial party.

Think about the implications of having the party in year three and year four. Then think about the fifth year, as these children are going into kindergarten. Think about the support network that these kids have that they wouldn't have if they hadn't had the first party. These children have all these mothers looking out for each other as their children move into kindergarten. A new kind of accountability emerges out of a simple community birthday party.

This story reminded Con of walking home from school as a boy. He would sneak by the railroad line to put a penny on the track. Then he'd wait around to watch the locomotive come through and squash the penny, then walk back to the tracks to retrieve the flattened coin. By the time he got home, his mom would know about it. One of the other moms who lived by the tracks and saw the whole thing would give his mom a call. She would tell his mother that he was fine and on the way home from school but that he had gotten a little too close to the train. Back then, communities had that kind of natural caring and mutual accountability among people. You can't turn that into a program, but we can retrieve that characteristic of community.

**Raising Passions at the Rotary Club** In the far southwest corner of Vermont is the community of Bennington. Con went to Bennington because he was invited by its Rotary Club to give the typical 20-minute speech. As many know who have done the same at other community groups, the drill is, You're on, you make your two points, and you're off. So his two points were two charts: The first chart showed child abuse rates for Vermont, and the second chart showed the rates for Bennington. However, Con held back the second chart until he made his point on the first. The chart for Vermont showed the beginning of a downward trend.

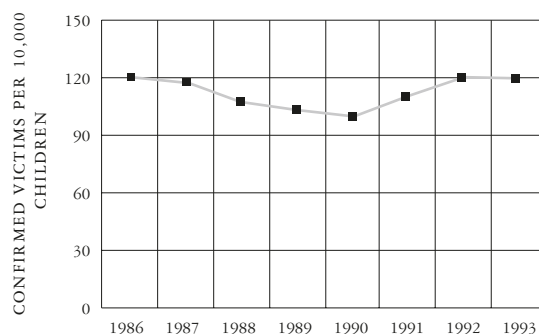
CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT: VERMONT



The message Con wanted to convey was that we have some cause for hope here. Whatever we are doing, we are starting to see improvement. He got spontaneous applause from these Rotary members, which he didn't expect. So now he knew that he was in real trouble as he prepared to show the second chart. That was the chart for Bennington, and its numbers were going the wrong way.

Immediately, members were standing up, one after the other, saying, this is wrong, why here, where is it worse, how can we do better, what are you going to do about it, what can we do about it, and so on. Those data got a very intense 5 to 10 minutes of reaction. Con learned a powerful lesson: the importance of information when presented in a simple way. Now, four years later, we had a third chart for Bennington, which Con took back to this group. The chart showed the rates beginning to move in the right direction.

CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT: BENNINGTON



### **Creative Answers Require a Good Question**

A common thread runs through these stories. Creativity is released when communities are asked a probing question. The question presents the opportunity for people to think through new ways to solve problems together. We have become so conditioned to having government solve our problems that we have abrogated our community responsibilities. Through disuse, we have forgotten how to make a difference in the lives of our neighbors.

If people in communities connect with each other around common purpose, they can do anything. If that common purpose involves addressing a local problem, then the right solutions will be found and the problems will be solved. It won't happen in every community. It can only happen in a community that wants to become involved in its own well-being. That's critical. We can say, "Let's do it; let's do it everywhere," but it won't last. That's how federal and state programs wax and wane. You can't do something in all places the same way or at the same time. Creative problem solving must come from within a community that cares, but it begins with asking the right question.

## Chapter 7:

### ENGAGING CITIZENS

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The engagement of ordinary citizens in the process of improving community well-being accounts as much as anything else for the energy and focus of outcomes work. Still, with more and more communities, jurisdictions, agencies, and programs pursuing an outcomes agenda, the individual citizen is rarely considered on par with these other players.

The vexing part of this oversight is that the power of ordinary citizens is right at hand. It is available and accessible. It is ourselves. Our individual potential, so underused, will atrophy if not put to task. While citizen engagement is acknowledged as important or even essential in determining goals, planning strategies, and evaluating activities, citizens have not typically been singled out in descriptions of this work.

**Process or Outcome?** Indeed, no consensus even exists on whether "citizen engagement" itself is an outcome or a process. Some argue that to portray citizen engagement as an "outcome" revives a preoccupation with process or "inputs" with which the outcomes-based accountability movement explicitly contrasts itself.

But is it that simple? The debate about process and outcomes is really the same as the traditional debate about means and ends. One potential danger in focusing on outcomes is that considerations of process (e.g., fairness, equity, respect) are slighted.<sup>5</sup> Does *how* we achieve the outcomes matter, as long as we get there? Of course it does. One should worry that the ends will be used to justify the means. One way to guard against *that* outcome is to make the means (citizen engagement) also one of the ends.

In a democracy, citizen engagement *is* an end—a goal, an outcome, a condition of society’s well-being—in the same sense that “Children Ready for School” or “Youth Choose Healthy Behaviors” are outcomes. We can appreciate this if we imagine a community where citizens are uninvolved, cynical or, at best, apathetic, resigned to a state of powerlessness over community conditions. Most would agree that this describes an unhealthy community and one destined to become even more so. Conversely, a community of citizens robustly involved in civic life is a healthy community, even in spite of other conditions that threaten well-being. Thus, citizen engagement is not simply a means to other ends.

Citizen engagement is both a process and an outcome.

**New Imperatives for Citizens** Several contemporary trends carry an assumption, more or less explicit, of citizen engagement.

One trend is the “reinventing government” movement. One of its features is to recast the citizen as “customer.” In this view, citizens-as-customers demand, appropriately, that government deliver value for reasonable cost, reduce “red tape” and other inefficiencies, and treat citizens as respected resources and intelligent consumers of information. The emphasis on outcomes or results, instead of procedures and activities, is central to “reinvented” government.<sup>5</sup> Because outcomes are framed in terms that reflect broadly shared public values (e.g., “Children Succeed in School”), they are not achievable by institutions and professionals alone. Such outcomes require the contributions of ordinary citizens as well.<sup>6</sup>

A second trend driving new forms of citizen engagement is the Internet. This technology serves as a great “leveler” of previous hierarchies based on access to knowledge and, through knowledge, power. With the Internet, ordinary citizens gain not only access to vast amounts of information but also the capacity to organize and communicate in new and more immediate ways, such as providing direct feedback to elected representatives.<sup>7</sup>

A third trend is “devolution,” which promises to move real decision making (e.g., on flexible deployment of resources, rule making, and so on) down to “lower” levels of government—from federal to state, from state to county and, in some cases, from county to communities. This process can only work well, however, if citizens take meaningful roles in shaping local solutions attuned to local conditions.<sup>8</sup>

**Status Reports on Citizen Engagement** These trends notwithstanding, many observers believe that citizen engagement, at least in some of its familiar forms, is in crisis. Alarm about the nature and extent of citizen engagement in this country is not new. Nevertheless, the voices are becoming more numerous, more various, and increasingly informed by data. For example, in 1999 a distinguished panel headed by Paul Volcker, former chair of the Federal Reserve System, issued a report<sup>9</sup> for the National Academy of Public Administration, stating that “many Americans participate minimally, if at all, in the democratic process.” The panel reported that, while a majority of Americans claim satisfaction with our system of government, their knowledge of the process of government and of public issues is appalling. They conclude, “civic ignorance is a conscious choice for many Americans.”

Along with these knowledge deficits, public trust in government has been declining for several decades. More than one-third of Americans believe that politics and government are too complicated to understand; more than two-fifths believe that their own families have no say in what government does.<sup>10</sup>

The Census Bureau reports that voter turnout in the 1998 elections was at an all-time low. An especially disturbing trend is that this decline was greatest among young people.<sup>11</sup> Young people’s knowledge of civic issues and responsibilities has also drawn concern. A third of the nation’s high school seniors recently failed tests of “basic” civics knowledge, such as the Constitution’s protection of minority rights against majority will.<sup>12</sup>

Others argue that, while traditional political participation is down, particularly with respect to national races and issues, more “grassroots” forms of citizen engagement, such as volunteerism, are alive and well. For instance, the National Household Education Survey of 1996 found that 59 percent of adults belong to community or professional organizations, 50 percent attend religious services at least monthly, and 39 percent participate in ongoing community service activities.<sup>13</sup> Among youth, more than half say they participate in community service during the school year.<sup>14</sup> Of course, these statistics, particularly those tracking membership alone, reflect little directly about citizen engagement.

Indeed, other signs indicate neighborhoods and communities are suffering from a loss of many informal social networks that formerly reduced isolation, promoted mutual aid, and provided avenues to more organized forms of citizen engagement.

the “self-advocacy” or “consumer empowerment” movement. This movement promotes informed advocacy and decision-making by the clients (and their family members) of a number of service systems—health, mental health, special education, public assistance, and so on. Fundamentally, this trend rests on the presumption that simply deferring the decisions to professionals about whether and how services are delivered is not only inherently undemocratic but also ultimately inefficient. Instead, those who receive services are generally better positioned to make decisions that “work” for them.<sup>16</sup>

Another powerful trend is to create more opportunities for youth to participate meaningfully in community and civic life. Young people are taking leadership roles in schools, in advocacy organizations, in youth-serving agencies. They are acquiring skills not only for personal development but also for creating significant community change.<sup>17</sup> The youth development literature

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**As youth move into more power-sharing relationships with adults, they challenge communities to reframe traditional notions of inclusion. This challenge requires that adults themselves learn new ways of interacting with and supporting young people.**

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One prosaic indicator of this trend is the demise of Welcome Wagon, an entry-point for newcomers in many communities for 70 years. Welcome Wagon, founded in 1928, provided new arrivals with home visits and gifts from their neighbors. At its peak during the 1960s, Welcome Wagon made 1.5 million visits; by 1998, visits had fallen to 0.5 million. As of 1999, Welcome Wagon no longer makes door-to-door visits; instead, it mails a directory of coupons, essentially becoming another “junk mailer.” The reasons behind this transformation are the same as those behind the erosion of other neighborhood institutions—from PTAs to civic associations, such as the Elks Club.<sup>15</sup> Few people have time for volunteer activities, particularly when that time competes with prime workday hours for *everyone* in the household.

Nevertheless, unmistakable signs indicate new forms of citizen engagement in our communities. One trend is

identifies such meaningful engagement as an important protective factor in the lives of young people.<sup>18</sup> As youth move into more power-sharing relationships with adults, they challenge communities to reframe traditional notions of inclusion. This challenge requires that adults themselves learn new ways of interacting with and supporting young people.

**Choosing Indicators** If citizen engagement is a legitimate aspect of well-being and a number of signs, both negative and positive, reflect its role in communities, then how best should we measure it? In general, we lack established indicators here. Citizen engagement is inherently difficult to quantify. Some of these efforts, such as family empowerment or youth participation, are still quite new. Also, the nature of this work has shown that the best indicators are locally developed, so that they authentically represent the modes of citizen engagement that may vary from place to place.

Voter turnout is probably the most used indicator for citizen engagement. Although voting is by no means the only or the most valid such sign, most people agree on its importance. The data on voting patterns and participation are also readily and consistently available. Yet, opportunities exist to go beyond the typical reporting. Describing voter participation as “the proportion of registered voters who go to the polls” ignores the fact that many eligible voters are not even registered. Thus, a more comprehensive indicator of engagement is “the proportion of the eligible voting population who actually vote.”

boards, including those of public nonprofit organizations. Who counts as a citizen representative? A parent, a youth, a consumer? We are familiar with the transparent fiction of professionals claiming they have parent representation on the boards of their organizations, because “we’re parents too.” We also know how difficult even token participation by those who were historically excluded from such representation is to achieve.

There is no avoiding the issue; the question is how honestly to measure progress.

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**While indispensable for achieving other quality-of-life outcomes, citizen engagement is not simply a means to other ends but an independent marker of community vitality.**

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Beyond measures of voter turnout, little consensus exists on other valid indicators of citizen engagement. Issues of definition arise: Who is a citizen? What is engagement? Within the formal political system, one can count the numbers of citizens serving on advisory or policy-making bodies (school boards, planning commissions, etc.) or, alternatively, the number of such posts that are unfilled or uncontested. Outside the government sphere, among the indicators suggested for engagement are the number of civic associations in a community, or membership in these as a percentage of total population, the proportion of citizens with library cards or newspaper subscriptions, the number of permits issued annually for block parties, the number of community gardens or green spaces, charitable contributions, and so on.

Any or all of these indicators may be important for a community to monitor, but such decisions are best locally determined. What is meaningful for one community is not necessarily so for another. Thus, any choice must be tempered by the burden of implementing and maintaining a homegrown data collection system to track the indicator.

Nevertheless, some potential indicators recur in every community. One is citizen representation on public

One suggestion is to count in “citizen engagement” those whose participation (as in attending meetings) is not an expectation of their paid employment. While perhaps not fully satisfactory, since this category would allow retired professionals, this definition is at least practical.

Given the early state of development for indicators of citizen engagement in many communities, “interim indicators” may be appropriate measures, such as counting capacity-building activities, like public speaking or group leadership.

An allied issue is that of “consumer” representation, highlighted especially in service systems for people with disabilities (including the disability of poverty). In these areas, the consumer empowerment movement justifiably argues that services ought to be designed and delivered, at least in part, by their recipients.<sup>19</sup> In the mental health field, for example, advisory boards to community mental health centers may be composed of a majority of current or former clients.<sup>20</sup> Similar arrangements are found in child foster care.<sup>21</sup> How to apply this principle to fields as broad based as health care or education is unclear. Nearly all community members could be considered current or former



recipients of these services. Nevertheless, an important intent exists here.

**Strategies for Progress** Citizen engagement needs nurturing if it is to thrive and grow. As with any outcome, strategies to achieve greater and more meaningful citizen engagement can make the difference. Beyond the examples already cited, a number of models exist for training citizens in community organizing, in public interest advocacy, and in local leadership. Some of these curricula are designed specifically for low-income citizens, parents, youth, or other special populations. The training includes specific skills, such as public speaking, negotiation, group process, leadership, media relations, and so on. Topics may also include activities to build self-esteem and help find one's own "voice."<sup>22</sup> Of course, such activities must be tailored to meet the unique needs of the target population. In other cases, mentoring relationships can provide the basis for learning and exercising these skills. Often, such as when developing capacity among youth for meaningful civic roles, the existing power groups (e.g., city councils, school boards) are the important mediators for these new power-sharing structures.

In many respects, these new forms of grassroots training in citizen engagement and civic leadership have taken the place of the "citizenship" or "civics" classes once common in high schools. These new strategies—more experiential, more practical, and more grounded in communities—aim to promote citizen engagement in many forms and throughout the life span.

In Vermont, the Agency of Human Services and its partners on the State Team for Children, Families, and Individuals adopted as the first of its outcomes, "Families, Youth, and Individuals Are Engaged in Their Community's Decisions and Activities." Under this outcome, we report on several indicators, including "percentage of eligible population voting," "parent involvement in schooling," and "student involvement in school decisionmaking."<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps the New England tradition of town meetings and the small size of most of our communities account for the value we place on broad-based participation. In any event, we believe that the civic health of a community is an irreducible element of well-being. While indispensable for achieving other quality-of-life outcomes, citizen engagement is not simply a means to other ends but an independent marker of community vitality.

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## The Tools of Outcomes Work

We've learned the importance of developing certain capacities in individuals and within communities along with emerging outcomes-based thinking. These capacities function as tools in implementing outcomes work. Tools include leadership skills, the collection and use of demographic and statistical data, the pursuit of policy research hand in hand with academic research, and collaboration on outcomes with a diversity of partners. The power of groups and individuals working together is arguably the most important resource for the common good.

These tools are discussed in turn in this section.

**Process Tools** Some tools are critical to the “process” of outcomes work. These can be distinguished from particular “strategies,” such as the use of media, which are discussed elsewhere.

### *Long-Term Planning*

We need to become more comfortable with long-range perspectives on change—personal, family, and community. As a society, we expect results quickly. Yet outcomes, by their nature, represent long-term visions of the possible.

Deliberate thinking is required about short-term and intermediate indicators—the interim milestones that indicate either that we're on the right path or that we need to correct course. This kind of “walking back” from the outcomes with as much specificity as possible is the “theory building” or “logic modeling,” in which all programs, agencies, and communities must engage, if we are to retain our energy for outcomes work (see Chapter 18). The whole field of trend analysis on social indicators is, unfortunately, in its infancy. So, we need to “grow” it.

### *Quantitative Thinking*

Managers, front-line workers, and ordinary citizens also need to educate themselves in new ways. They need to become conversant in the language of data and statistics. Indicators require the language of quantitative analysis. Thus, a major handicap to outcomes work is that professionals in the human services field are, in general, temperamentally averse to quantitative approaches to understanding. They are “people people” and often contrast themselves explicitly with “numbers people” or “technical people.”

However, we need to keep reminding each other—and ourselves—that the numbers do indeed represent people.

### *Funding*

Another component of outcomes-work is, of course, funding. However, we need funding mechanisms that can follow (or at least not be at cross-purposes with) the outcomes-strategy. In spite of numerous calls for less-categorical funding streams, foundations and governments have been slow to respond—often because they are themselves caught in the middle of requirements set by others. Ultimately, this funding component reflects our cultural preoccupation with reactive measures, such as problem solving, rather than proactive measures, such as preventive interventions.

Some states and communities are starting to challenge this way of doing business. For example, they are pooling funds or, more radically, trading greater accountability on outcomes for greater flexibility on spending. For example, as we saw in Chapter 6, child welfare workers in Vermont's Lamoille County negotiated with the state to recoup some of the savings resulting from their efforts to reduce the numbers of children going into out-of-home custody (foster care). By showing improved outcomes, the county office was able to obtain additional resources to maintain some innovative, prevention-oriented strategies to keep children with their families. Until we can organize funding around outcomes, the money will continue to exert a counterforce that can severely limit, if not wholly sabotage, progress.

Apropos of financing is a mistake that organizations often make as they look ahead. They concentrate on streamlining, integrating, or decategorizing funding, as if the funding were the focus of attention rather than the means to an end. Starting instead with the end in mind—that is, the outcomes—results in integrating funds without threatening any organization, budget, or fiscal plan.

### *Focused Human Energy*

Notwithstanding the importance of funding, one of the traps for human services people is to assume that everything is a question of money. An outcomes-based approach helps us think about another kind of resource, an intangible one. This resource may even be more important than cash flow—it’s “focused human energy.” Its benefits are several:

- **You don’t owe anyone anything.** No one is keeping score as they do with tangible transactions. Focused energy is not something that can be easily calculated on a tally sheet.
- **You don’t need approval.** Making a monetary investment in a program requires budget review and approval. Creating focused energy around specific issues requires no approval. In fact, anyone can generate it at any level and at any time.
- **Low-cost focused energy is interchangeable.** Human energy applies in all settings, has great flexibility, and is not categorical in its impact.
- **It’s a “value-added” exercise.** Focused energy can be constructed on top of existing budgets and programs. It is, in fact, value added to the work.
- **It’s intangible.** The power of focused energy is limitless. Its asset can become a very significant part of the equation over time.
- **“Raiding the cookie jar” is harder.** Tangible investments are vulnerable to economic weather and budgetary struggles across organizations. The intangible nature of focused energy is safer from being misappropriated than the tangible investments of budgets and personnel systems.

## Chapter 8:

### LEADERSHIP

Leadership is at the center of outcomes work, as it is in so many things. Yet, it’s often overlooked as we concentrate on systems and resources in our rush toward goals. As technology increasingly distances us from interpersonal relationships, the need for plain, old-fashioned leadership becomes even more important.

To be a leader today is harder than it was in earlier times. Professional ambitions have less room to move forward. Our talents and skills have to compete more and more and for a larger audience. It’s tougher to break out of the crowd—but we can. We all know situations in which leadership has emerged. We need to find those natural leaders at every level. They see the future. And outcomes and leadership go hand in hand.

**The Initiative of Human Spirit** An example of just what you can do when you make up your mind to achieve something appeared not long ago in the obituaries of *The London Times*.<sup>1</sup> Des Renford, 72 years old when he died, had been a butcher, a barkeeper, and a bookmaker but, at the age of 39, he decided to learn how to swim. After that, he swam the 28 miles of the English Channel between England and France—19 times! Once, he was even run over by a hovercraft. He was an indefatigable character who had the spirit to accomplish his goals.

On one of his last swims, he struggled to shore on the English side and collapsed, blue with hypothermia. A gentleman with a little dog wandered up the beach, looked down at him, and asked, “been swimming, hey?” Seriously, Des Renford does represent the power and possibilities of the human spirit.

The power of leadership in human relationships is one of the least examined aspects of family and community development. We’ve become good at creating “systems” of care and knowing how to apply “process” in our

community work. One hallmark of leadership is the ability to recall “first purposes.” In human services work, outcomes are our first purposes. By continually returning to the outcomes, by reframing issues in terms of long-range goals, leaders “keep the flame” for those whom they lead.

Leadership occurs at every level and affects every aspect of our lives. The following stories are about the power of individuals who left their mark on their communities. We all know people like these, but we need to be reminded about the power that results when individuals influence and mobilize other people to achieve common purpose.

**Swede Monson** Swede Monson<sup>2</sup> started as a “swabbie” in the U.S. Navy in the 1920s. He had always been intrigued with finding “the better way.” In the 1920s and early 1930s, a series of submarine sinkings occurred off the coast of the eastern United States. At that time, a submarine sinking meant all hands were lost. What was even more tragic was that most of the sinkings occurred on the continental shelf, at depths of less than 200 feet and, on occasion, less than 75 feet. Monson was bothered deeply by these circumstances. As he rose in the ranks, he delved more and more into solving the problem of retrieving survivors of submarine sinkings. However, the Navy would have none of it. Monson was discouraged from his explorations; he was blocked at every turn. So, Monson went “underground,” working with a network of others within the system who believed in his vision.

He and his conspirators designed a diving bell, which could withstand pressures up to 200 feet, with a collar that fit over the submarine’s hatch cover. In his research, Monson offered himself as a guinea pig to test new theories about oxygen–nitrogen mixtures at different depths. Still, the Navy resisted.

So, Monson went public with his idea and succeeded in generating enough political pressure for a live test. In a controlled trial on an actual sub, his bell and collar worked. Subsequently, most coastal submarines were fitted with the Monson Collar.

In 1938, the submarine *Squalis* went down off the coast of New Hampshire near the Isle of Shoals. On board were 110 men. Prior to Monson’s invention, they would automatically have been considered lost. Monson flew out to supervise the rescue effort personally. There was rough water, and conditions on board were terrible. The rescue effort was excruciating but, in the end, most of the men were saved.

One man’s passion to find a better way changed an entire set of attitudes and procedures. He succeeded in bucking one of the most unyielding bureaucracies.

As a result of his work, Monson rose quickly in the naval hierarchy and became a highly decorated commander in World War II. His quiet leadership at a national level, along with his persistence and technical expertise, made a huge difference. Not only did he save lives, but his inventions served as the basis for other technological breakthroughs. The most recent application was with the Russian submarine that sank off the northern coast of Norway in spring 2000.

### **Strong Leadership in Yeruham, Israel**

Yeruham is a city of about 10,000. Established in 1951, it was one of the first developing towns in Israel, with many of the problems that face new towns composed almost entirely of immigrants. By 1986, Yeruham was leading a fight on behalf of all developing towns to get the national government to acknowledge their special needs. There were some serious negative dynamics that transpired between those early years and 1992, when a leader began to turn things around.

People who stayed in Yeruham were considered “failures.” The more successful immigrants struck out for new lives. By 1992, over 1,000 dwelling units were empty, a wide variety of organizations were not working together, and the main community center was closed. The town had a major deficit, the second largest in the country, at 25 percent of its total budget, much of which went to pay down the debt. But in 1992, following some pivotal elections, changes began.

Mayor Motti Shure was elected that year. At the time of Con's visit there, he had been in office for eight years, with about three more to go. In that time, the city had dramatically turned around high school graduation rates as well as matriculation rates to college. The budget was balanced for several years, for which the city won a national prize. Their professional staff were experienced, a major change from the past. Overall, stability had arrived, and the city is now tracking additional positive results.

Considerable improvement in the quality of government came by downsizing and streamlining the bureaucracy. In this case, the mayor was a strong enough leader to shape the ruling coalition after the elections. The administration started some important

cry is "Every child can. ..." The intangible asset of "people power" is a prominent common theme.

Other common lessons learned had to do with using data. The mayor is deeply involved with the national ministry in creating indicator data that can be used not only in Yeruham but also for 30 other developing communities across Israel.

Something else that stood out was the obvious pride all shared in their work. Both cities are starting to see results, which is powerfully motivating. Both our communities also realize that this work takes time. Yeruham is into its eighth year and just beginning to see sustained results, which is consistent with our experience in Vermont.

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**In human services work, outcomes are our first purposes. By continually returning to the outcomes, by reframing issues in terms of long-range goals, leaders "keep the flame" for those whom they lead.**

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work in the education systems in 1995. In one of the city's regions, someone in every family is moving into higher education. The mayor's personal goal is that all the city's children will finish high school as productive and contributing citizens. More broadly, his goal is that Yeruham be a place where people want to live and where continuing immigration contributes to the strength of the community. In that regard, strategies for economic development are critical. For example, soldiers who come out of service have typically gone on to higher level technical training. The mayor is pushing them to go on to the university level more quickly, thus freeing up slots for local citizens and immigrants to improve their technical skills.

In a recent visit, Con and Yeruham's mayor discussed parallels and common lessons between the city's experience and the Barre project in Vermont (see Appendix D). Most obvious was the role leadership had played. Second, both were struck by the loftiness of the goals each community set for itself. In Yeruham, the rallying

One of the areas where Con gently challenged the Mayor was the apparent lack in Yeruham's work of any systematic focus on early childhood, despite quite a few people there who would like to see that as a priority. As it turned out, the thought was not alien to the mayor and his coalition's overall plan.

**The Women of Port Graham** During a visit by Con to Alaska, the state's Commissioner of Health and Social Services, Karen Perdue, asked if he would like to accompany her on a visit to an isolated, outlying community. Of course, he jumped at the chance. Susan LaBelle, an Aleut colleague of Karen's, joined Con. Susan was born and raised in Port Graham. Although she had left for the Anchorage region years ago, she still had several relatives in the village. Following are Con's notes about what he learned.

*Commissioner Perdue, Susan LaBelle, and I left a dirt runway in a small Cessna and beaded over the Turnagain Fjord through the Kenai Mountains, skirting the Harding Ice Fields. We then aimed for Port Graham, a small Aleut*



*village nestled between the sea and the mountains, several hundred miles away.*

*From the air, the role fishing had in the village was obvious. A cannery, hatchery, docks, boats, nets, and small dwellings all composed a tranquil picture from the air. We landed on a dirt strip behind the town. We worked out a rendezvous time with the pilot, who wanted to head back before loss of light. We agreed to meet at 7:30 p.m. at the airstrip, which gave us almost three hours to visit.*

*A small sign at the runway welcomed us to Port Graham, a "proud village of Aleut people." The sign indicated a population of 189 people, which was later detailed as 70 families and households with 25 children of elementary school age. We walked about an eighth of a mile down a graveled street, which paralleled the shoreline behind a row of very small, mostly self-made houses. Some were abandoned; others were well kept. All had decades of worn-out machinery or vehicles scattered about, although we later learned that the extent of this disarray had improved greatly over the last few years.*

*We walked to the community center, a spacious building used for tribal council meetings, community events, and other get-togethers. The building was about 15 years old but was nicely kept up. Rules of the road, admonishments, encouragements, a large U.S. flag, native artwork, and posters covered the walls and gave an inviting impression.*

*One startling photograph on the wall was of an abused young girl with her hands covering her eyes in a pose of shame. The same photograph had been used in Vermont six years ago as part of a publication by the state's child protection agency, which was a stark summary of the previous year's child abuse statistics. To see this photo here in an Alaskan village clearly told me how small the world is getting and how similar our problems are.*

*Waiting at the community center to greet us was Elenore McMullen, an Aleut who appeared to be about 60 years old. Elenore is the Chief Health Aide for Port Graham and also a member of the native village council. Also, joining us were Mary Malchoff, an Indian child welfare worker, and Agnes Miller, a village council member and also a health aide. All three were Aleuts. Their first warm*

*surprise for me was a buffet. Elenore quietly let me know that she had caught and smoked the salmon herself.*

*Like Port Graham, the many small villages that they work with are scattered along the coast, so opportunity for quiet conversation about the things they care about is unusual. To have the Alaska Commissioner present as well was rare. The next two hours hosted a remarkable conversation.*

*"Larry" had been in the community since he was 14, when he arrived from Mississippi after a Port Graham expatriate had given up trying to raise him. With a lot of uncontrolled sexual acting out and constantly stealing, Larry stayed under the supervision of Elenore and Mary. The six years were difficult. He is now on the "mainland" in a supervised living situation, but the women are very worried about him and took full advantage of this moment to let Karen know.*

*Too many case managers come and go with inadequate services to back them up, they tell Karen. Scheduling and coordinating Larry's visits from the mainland are constant irritants, which result in continuous churning of effort. No one has figured out how to get these needed resources to the people in the community. Grappling with the state's conception of appropriate services seemed to be an ongoing issue.*

*Quite a few students (they were reticent to share a specific number) at the elementary school were not learning to read. Much of that is related to the intense special education needs, which are not nearly being met, they tell us. Several elders are being abused in the community. Reports to the police, who rarely visit the village, haven't helped. The visitors prodded the commissioner for her ideas on how to deal with these problems. They seemed satisfied with her concrete suggestions.*

*At this point, I'm beginning to understand that the opportunity to have this conversation is counting more than the actual resolution of the problems.*

*Several older community members are drinking themselves to death. The tribal council has quietly confronted the offenders. As the conversation about the role of the tribal council unfolds, we begin to see the role of the council as*

*fundamental to social control in the village. But this wasn't always so.*

*The conversation wanders back to 1972, when Elenore came back to the village after many years away. (Children leave the village and go "away" for their secondary education.) After 20 years, Elenore was frightened when she saw the changes upon her return. Elenore told us what life was like in 1972: "Everyone was drinking." It wasn't safe to walk down the little main street. People wandered around openly with bottles in their hands. Child sexual abuse was common; the odds of a young person escaping abuse were low. In fact, the tribal council itself had been compromised, because some of the members of the council were offenders themselves.*

*Elenore's story, with constant reinforcement from Susan and the others, became even more compelling. She told of the day when, with great trepidation, she approached the tribal council to tell them she wanted to live in Port Grabam again, but she was afraid. Things had to change. The tribal council told her that, if things were going to change, she would have to change them herself. Elenore viewed this as a good thing. The council had not rejected her and, more importantly, the expected backlash had not occurred.*

*She painted us the picture of how, over time, the council began to clean up its own membership and image. One by one, the worst offenders in the town were confronted, and flagrant misbehavior began to subside. Over the years, needed services were slowly introduced. The most important was the clean, spacious, and well-used health clinic, which was built next to the community center only a few years ago. The clinic is staffed with health aides, like Elenore and Mary, who are trained by the Alaskan Health Service. The role of the government in providing health services to Native Americans is essential. These Aleut women told us that the government has served them well.*

*The health clinic is a symbol of progress and hope to the community. Physical fitness classes, weight loss classes, and a variety of other community activities are held here. There is even a "safe" room where a person can "drop out" for a day or two or where someone might sober up without risk of harm. They pointed out plaques on the wall that are*

*reminders of sea rescues, where the clinic played an important role in saving lives.*

*The women's roles as health aides extended into the fabric of the community. They described how it can take half a day to MediVac someone to the mainland who has been seriously injured. Their primary consideration goes, not to the patient, but to the rescuers who risk their own lives to help the Aleuts.*

*Later, we took a 5-mile-an-hour car tour of the community. We visited the hatchery, which was brand new, because the other burned a couple of years ago. Elenore is also the manager of the hatchery. She showed us where they are clearing land and putting in sewer and water lines, so that the villagers can spread out a little, improve their housing, and gain access to these basics. We visited the waste dump, and they showed us how well it is managed. They showed us the woodpiles that are left for people who don't have enough fuel. They showed us the tiny food pantry, where they only have to mention to other community members that someone's in need, and it fills immediately with donations.*

*They proudly showed us all of the physical improvements in the community that were funded by the Exxon Valdez dollars.*

*The highlight of the conversation came when the women reported that, although serious areas of dysfunction still exist, their community is now safe, developing economically, and has a spirit of accomplishment. The twinkle in Elenore's eye as she told us of the 20-year march toward self-improvement made my day.*

*They all came to the runway to see us off and gave the Commissioner a bag of freshly caught salmon—the ultimate compliment, according to Karen.*

*Port Grabam's challenges are still formidable. They are slowly losing population, particularly young people, who move out for education and opportunities beyond. As a result, the people in the community are older. I wondered out loud about the next generation of leadership, when Elenore, Mary, and Agnes begin to wind down.*

# Chapter 9:

## DATA AS ENERGIZER

Issues of data tend to become overcomplicated in outcomes work. Most of the data that we need to construct the indicators are already available to us. In fact, often as not, we are swimming in data. The volume increases our options but also increases the complexity. Thus, organizing data in purposeful ways, although difficult is decidedly worthwhile.

The challenge is to be selective with the information available, then organize it. When complex data are applied within a unifying framework, the data become more understandable and useful. When the data are associated with specific indicators as part of agreed on outcomes, they allow us to track progress toward meaningful goals.

### **Current Data Systems in Human Services**

Measuring the results of our work is not the norm in the human services field. Usually, results are measured only in response to federal or state reporting requirements. The data are treated accordingly: routinely not kept current and updated only when reporting time comes. Consequently, their quality is often suspect.

The management systems within human services have little incentive to provide indicator data on a timely basis. Thus, “current” data are sometimes three or more years old, which severely limits their usefulness. Also, what data that do exist are usually organized at a program level, not at cross-program or cross-sector levels. Further, data often take the form of point-in-time reporting and, notably, are presented without the motivating power of graphics. Because data are not at the center of our work, human services personnel do not value data very highly. Yet, our progress toward well-being depends on indicator data. Bringing indicators to the fore, on a daily basis, inevitably results in improved

quality (including timeliness) of data—for program evaluation, for operations and management, and for cross-sector reporting.

When data are valued, the support systems that produce them also improve. For example, when a community group requests indicator data on teen pregnancies in their area, constructive pressure is brought to bear on public health systems to collect, review, critique, and publish more timely data on that indicator. Much improvement is needed on the timeliness of data, in particular, especially for vital statistics, which includes a host of data about births, marriages, mortality, and so on. The information exists, but management has not given time—trend reporting a priority.

Another area due for improvement is better use of data already collected. For example, it’s not uncommon for a local jurisdiction to need an important piece of information that already exists in the state data system, but it’s “not available.” Perhaps that community should produce an empty graph to motivate the system gatekeepers to have those data available for the next reporting cycle. The message here is simple: The use of data spurs the availability of data, and the more data are used in outcomes work, the more the data will improve in quality.

**Community Use of Data** For communities pursuing an outcomes agenda, the data work is primarily identifying, collecting, organizing, formatting, and reporting on the indicators. The work should be focused, not all-encompassing. Yet, we have watched some community collaboratives in their earliest stages of development take on the task of constructing and implementing a “data warehouse,” with accompanying major investments in new information systems. Besides being expensive, such systems are usually unnecessary for outcomes-and-indicators work. Indeed, they often collapse under their own weight while planning is still in process. Moreover, these “big-picture” initiatives inevitably engender turf wars. Rarely do mega data systems work.

Ideally, data to support outcomes and indicators are focused (and, thus, relatively inexpensive), politically neutral, short-term timely, and localized.

Any data work should never precede the articulation of common outcomes across organizations. Also, a clear, common purpose across organizations must precede agreed-on outcomes, which should precede identifying their relevant indicators. In that sequence, the data obtained are properly constrained by the unifying framework.

Localizing the data is very important. For maximum usefulness, data need to reflect the smallest practical geographic unit. If data are found for a larger area or constituency, the task is to disaggregate the data to the local level. Local data can always be aggregated upward. For example, if the lowest level of data is the area served by a school district, the usefulness of the data may be enhanced by aggregating to a larger region, such as one used by health care services or funding agencies.

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**The purpose of the data is to propel action; data alone are sterile. Data properly take their place in a continuous feedback process between indicators and outcomes.**

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The most important task in data development is setting baselines for the indicators along with the notations needed to quickly find sources of data.

As far as possible, all data should be found in pre-existing sources. Occasionally, a community will identify an indicator that they believe is sufficiently important to warrant collecting new data. They should be forewarned: Developing new data systems is not easy. Regardless of its origin, a data quality control group will, ideally, take responsibility for checking the data's reliability and validity and for monitoring data quality as the project develops.

Data must also connect to action. One sure way for a community change effort to run out of steam is to get stuck in the data collection and data analysis stage. The purpose of the data is to propel action; data alone are sterile. Data properly take their place in a continuous feedback process between indicators and outcomes.

**Presentation of Data** Examples from Vermont's indicators work enable us to make two points about data. First, having a strong outcomes-and-indicators framework helps to sharpen our use of data, contributing to clearer evidence of progress on common purpose. Second, having evolved from a point-in-time presentation to an over-time array has strengthened the impact of this work.

*Point-in-Time Rates*

Percentages or other rates at a particular point in time are probably the most frequent ways of presenting data. Here are some of Vermont's indicators with their associated rates for the most recent year available (except where otherwise indicated, the universe is the total state population).

<b>Vermont Indicators, 1999–2001</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Rate (%)</b>
Schools in School Meals Programs <i>(% of all schools)</i>	2001	78.7
Families receiving “Welcome-Baby” visits <i>(% of families with newborns)</i>	2000	87.0
Child support cases with collections <i>(% of all cases)</i>	2000	64.4
Institutionalization for mental illness	1999	0.008
Parentage established for child support cases <i>(% of out-of-wedlock cases)</i>	2000	90.0
Child abuse and neglect ( <i>substantiated victims as a % of population ages 0–5</i> )	2000	0.07
Alcohol-related motor vehicle deaths	2000	0.005
Young teen pregnancy rate <i>(% of girls ages 15–17)</i>	2000	1.9
Late or no prenatal care <i>(% of women giving birth)</i>	2000	2.0
Motor vehicle crash deaths	2000	0.01
Deaths from cardiovascular disease	2000	0.2
Teen birth rate <i>(% of girls ages 15–19)</i>	2000	2.3
Youth unemployment <i>(% of teens ages 16–19)</i>	2000	7.7
Property crime	2000	2.9
Two-year-olds fully immunized	2000	83.0
Violent crime	2000	0.1
Suicide	2000	0.01
Repeat births to teens <i>(% of all births to teens)</i>	2000	13.5
Children with health insurance	2000	96.0
Early prenatal care <i>(% of women giving birth)</i>	2000	88.5
People with health insurance	2000	91.6

These data, although interesting, provide little context and no perspective as to how indicators may or may not be changing. Still, point-in-time rates are a typical presentation.

#### *Rates at Two Points in Time*

An improvement in presenting data is to show two points in time. The same indicators are used, but covering a sufficient period of time permits greater confidence that any trends in the data are relatively robust. Having such “directional” data enables us to

begin answering the question “*Are we getting better or worse?*” Here are some of Vermont’s indicators shown at two points in time, which reflects change.

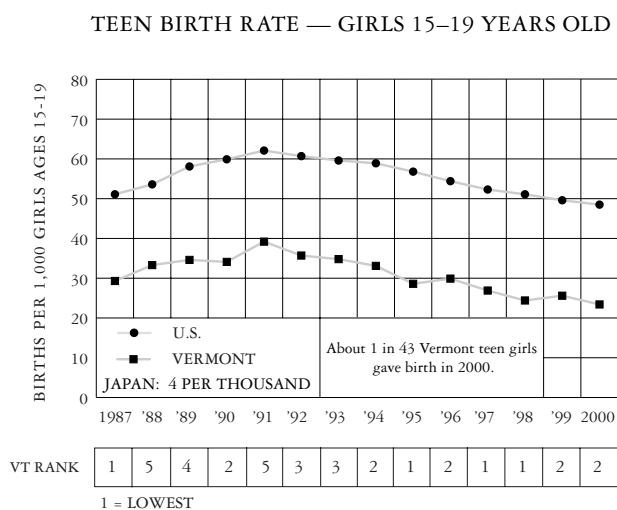
<b>Vermont Improving Indicators, 1991–2000</b>	<b>2000 Rate (%)</b>	<b>Improvement (%)</b>
Schools in School Meals Programs <i>(% of all schools)</i>	78.7 <i>(2001)</i>	282
Families receiving “Welcome-Baby” visits <i>(% of families with newborns)</i>	87.0	181 <i>(1994–00)</i>
Child support cases with collections <i>(% of all cases)</i>	64.4	124
Parentage established for child support cases <i>(% of out-of-wedlock cases)</i>	90.0	58
Institutionalization for mental illness	0.008 <i>(1999)</i>	52
Alcohol-related motor vehicle deaths	0.005	52
Young teen pregnancy rate <i>(ages 15–17)</i>	1.9	49
Youth unemployment <i>(% of teens ages 16–19)</i>	7.7	43
Teen birth rate <i>(% of all births to teens)</i>	2.3	40
Repeat births to teens <i>(% of all births to teens)</i>	13.5	27
Property crime	2.9	25
Late or no prenatal care <i>(% of women giving birth)</i>	2.0	23
Suicide	0.01	23
Two-year-olds fully immunized	83.0	22 <i>(1989–00)</i>
Motor vehicle crash deaths	0.01	22
Child abuse and neglect <i>(substantiated victims as a % of population ages 0–5)</i>	0.07	21
Deaths from cardiovascular disease	0.2	19
Children with health insurance	96.0	15
Early prenatal care <i>(% of women giving birth)</i>	88.5	6
People with health insurance	91.6	5
Violent crime	0.1	3

Source: Vermont Agency of Human Services. The Social Well-Being of Vermonters, 2002: A Report on Outcomes for Vermont’s Citizens. Waterbury, VT: Author, 2002.

Two improvements have occurred with this presentation. First, change on each of the indicators is shown over a consistent time period; second, the indicators are ranked according to their degree of change. This reorganization suggests the relative “weight” contributed by these indicators during this period. It also suggests clusters of indicators that are improving at similar rates.

### Graphic Change Over Time

The next step is to present change over time graphically. A visual representation, such as a trend line, reveals specific dynamics of indicator change. The visual format helps one begin to understand the story *behind* the trend, which becomes important when devising strategies to change the trend.



Sources: Vermont Vital Statistics System; National Center for Health Statistics; UNICEF, *The progress of nations*.

This figure also introduces comparisons with the nation and with other states. Not only can we see if things are getting better or worse in our own state, we can also see how we fare against other states.

These data tell an interesting story. After a period of mostly rising teen birth rates from 1987 to 1991, rates both for the nation and for Vermont began gradually to decline. This change probably has multiple explanations, including broadened access to health care, more effective contraception, concern about AIDS and other

sexually transmitted diseases, increased recognition of the value of continuing one’s education, and greater equality among young women and men in negotiating sexual decisions.

The enhanced data also tell us that Vermont’s rank has consistently been in the top five among the states over this period. This trend invites questions about the dynamics behind these differences. Answers might suggest possibilities for further improvement. The graphic introduces yet another comparison, which serves to check any complacency that might accompany being “number one”—namely, Japan’s rate is just one-sixth of Vermont’s.

**Enhancing the Data Presentation** The next step is to put indicator data in a broader context. For that, we need a narrative to summarize the indicator’s significance, the factors thought to influence the trend, and impacts on any related indicators. The narrative also provides an opportunity to provide data sources and any necessary explanatory notes. Following is part of the narrative that accompanies the chart on teen births and another on teen pregnancy<sup>3</sup>:

*The vast majority of teen pregnancies are unintended and/or the result of coercion.<sup>4</sup> Although pregnancy, childbearing, and parenting are statistically risky choices throughout the teen years, they are especially so for teens younger than 18. Health risks (to mother and child), the potential for disrupted education, and diminished economic prospects are all greater among this group. Moreover, the annual cost to taxpayers attributed to childbearing in this age group is estimated at \$6.9 billion.<sup>5</sup> In recent years, Vermont pregnancy rates among 15- to 17-year-olds were lower than at any time during the past 13 years.<sup>6</sup> However encouraging the data, we need continued progress, since the consequences associated with teen pregnancy are often so detrimental for both parents and children.*

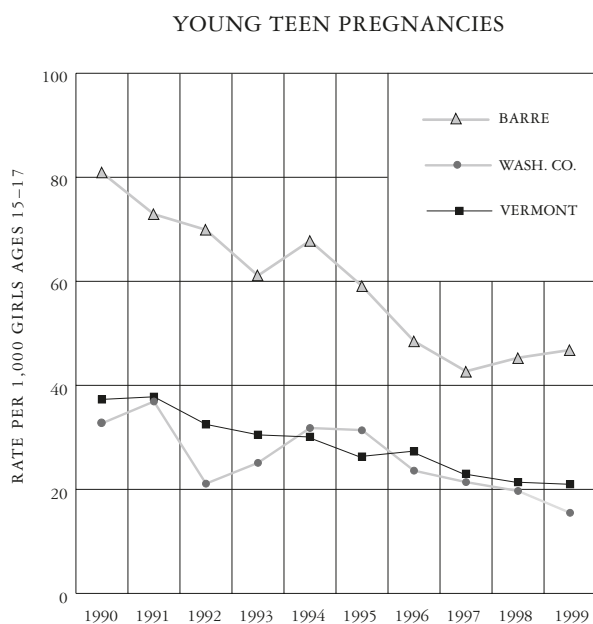
*One factor behind this declining trend is access to appropriate health care as well as to comprehensive health and sexuality education. With access to such opportunities, teens can learn responsible decisionmaking. In addition, some research suggests that nearly half of adolescent girls who*



become pregnant were previously victims of sexual abuse, which is associated with later risky sexual behavior.<sup>7</sup> If Vermont can continue its already remarkable progress in reducing child sexual abuse, we may see even fewer of our teens becoming pregnant.

#### Localizing Graphics and Adding Comparisons

The next step in maximizing the usefulness of data is to localize the information. Vermont presents its indicators at the level of school supervisory unions.<sup>8</sup> Vermont's citizens are naturally interested in the well-being of children and families within their own school districts. For other purposes, we could aggregate the data to larger areas of interest, such as health care service areas or economic jurisdictions. Here is the teen pregnancy chart for the city of Barre, which represents one school district with about 10,000 residents.



This chart allows Barre to see its teen pregnancy trend and to compare that with trends for Washington County (in which Barre is situated) and for the state. In fact, this chart was particularly useful for a community-wide effort in Barre to lower its rate of teen pregnancies (see Appendix D). As the chart suggests, the effort showed some success.

#### Arraying Indicators by Outcome

A further evolution in presenting indicator data is to organize the indicators according to specific outcomes of well-being. This approach lets one judge whether specific areas of well-being are improving, staying the same, or worsening over time.

<b>Vermont Improving Indicators, 1991-2000</b>	<b>2000 Rate (%)</b>	<b>Improvement (%)</b>
<b>Pregnant Women and Young Children Thrive</b>		
Families receiving "Welcome-Baby" visits ( <i>% of families with newborns</i> )	87.0	181 <i>(1994-00)</i>
Late or no prenatal care ( <i>% of women giving birth</i> )	2.0	23
Two-year-olds fully immunized	83.0	22 <i>(1989-00)</i>
Early prenatal care ( <i>% of women giving birth</i> )	88.5	6
Children with health insurance	96.0	15
<b>Children Are Ready for School</b>		
Screened children with elevated lead levels ( <i>ages 0-5</i> )	6.3	59
Child abuse and neglect ( <i>substantiated victims as a % of population ages 0-5</i> )	0.7	21
<b>Children Succeed in School</b>		
Schools in School Meals programs ( <i>% of all schools</i> )	78.7	282
Children ages 0-4 on welfare	10.3	39
<b>Children Live in Stable, Supported Families</b>		
Child support cases with collections ( <i>% of all cases</i> )	64.4	56
Parentage established for child support cases ( <i>% of out-of-wedlock cases</i> )	90.0	58
Child abuse and neglect, all ages ( <i>substantiated victims as % of population ages 0-17</i> )	0.71	29
People with health insurance	91.6	5

*Continued*

<b>Vermont Improving Indicators, 1991-2000</b> <i>(continued)</i>	<b>2000 Rate (%)</b>	<b>Improve- ment (%)</b>
<b>Youth Choose Healthy Behaviors and Successfully Transition to Adulthood</b>		
Teen motor vehicle deaths involving alcohol	50.0	32
Teen sexually transmitted diseases	0.52	49
Young teen pregnancy rate <i>(ages 15-17)</i>	1.9	49
Teen birth rate	2.3	40
Youth unemployment	7.7	43
Repeat births to teens	12.2	27
<b>People Live in Safe and Supportive Communities</b>		
Deaths from alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes	0.005	52
Property crime	3.0	25
Motor vehicle crash deaths	0.01	22
Violent crime	0.1	3
Deaths from cardiovascular disease	0.2	19
<b>Elders and People Live With Dignity and Independence in Settings They Prefer</b>		
Developmentally disabled in institutions	0	100
Institutionalization for mental illness	0.008 <i>(1999)</i>	52
Suicide	0.01	23
Elders living in nursing homes	4.1	16 <i>(1992-00)</i>

Connecting the indicators to related outcomes gives a sense of their interactive power and potential. Each indicator's contribution toward improving well-being is connected to powerful outcomes statements. Thus, the line of sight between our work individually and collectively becomes clearer, as do the conditions of well-being toward which we aim.

### *Connecting Outcomes and Their Indicators to Activity and Strategy*

Once the connections among outcomes and indicators over time are clear, we need to link these connections to our daily work. The grid below is an example of how indicators can be organized around the interests of local partnerships and their identified outcomes. Organizing information in a simple table is useful for connecting the activities of local partnerships more closely to their chosen outcomes.

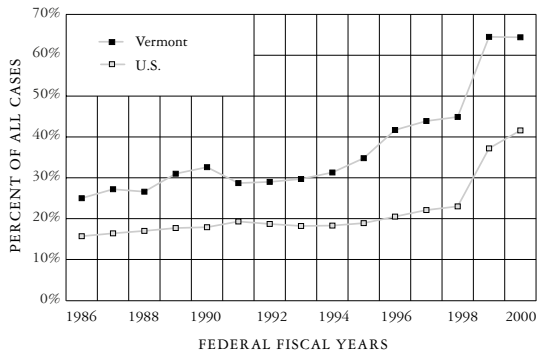
	LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS	OUTCOMES OF PRIMARY INTEREST	INDICATORS		
			"BEST"	"PROMISING"	"WORST"
1					
2					
3					
ETC.					

The following display is an excerpt from *Outcomes-Based Planning*, a publication of the Vermont Agency of Human Services. The latest version of Outcomes-Based Planning is available online at [www.ahs.state.vt.us/connections](http://www.ahs.state.vt.us/connections). This display illustrates that connective process at a state level.

For each outcome (here, 'Children Live in Stable, Supported Families'), three "heartening" and three "troubling" indicators are highlighted. Accompanying the indicators are brief explanations of these trends, and specific recommendations for addressing continued progress.

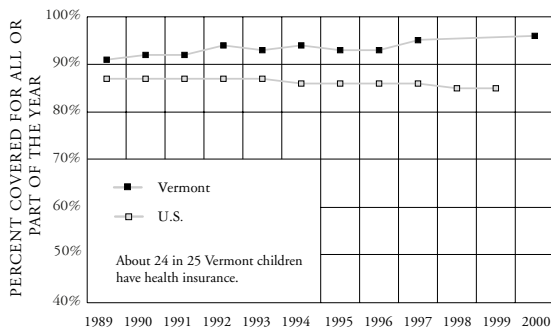
HEARTENING INDICATORS

CHILD SUPPORT CASES WITH COLLECTIONS



\*U.S. data are preliminary  
Source: U.S. DHHS, Office of Child Support.

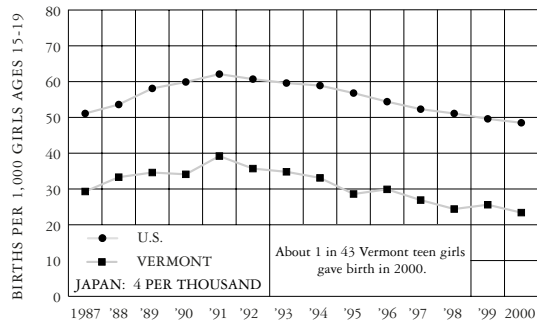
CHILDREN WITH HEALTH INSURANCE



\*Each year is a 3-year average: e.g., 1996 is the average of 1994-96.  
Exceptions are "Vermont, 1997 and 2000" (single-year data).

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, March Current Population Survey;  
Vermont Department of BISHCA and OVHA.

TEEN BIRTH RATE — GIRLS 15-19 YEARS OLD

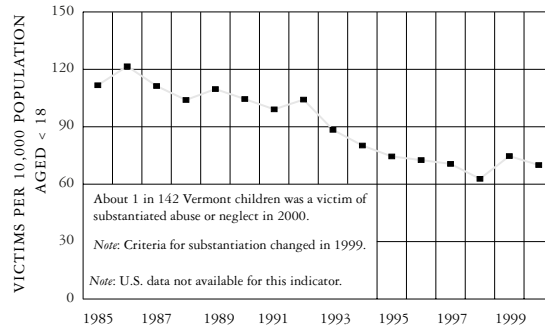


VT RANK	1	5	4	2	5	3	3	2	1	2	1	1	2	2
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Sources: Vermont Vital Statistics System; National Center for Health Statistics;  
UNICEF, *The progress of nations*.

TROUBLING INDICATORS

CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT IN VERMONT  
SUBSTANTIATED VICTIMS



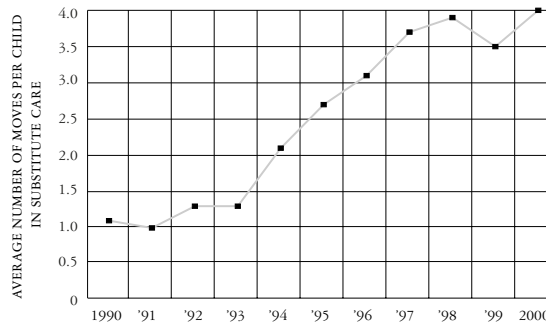
About 1 in 142 Vermont children was a victim of substantiated abuse or neglect in 2000.

Note: Criteria for substantiation changed in 1999.

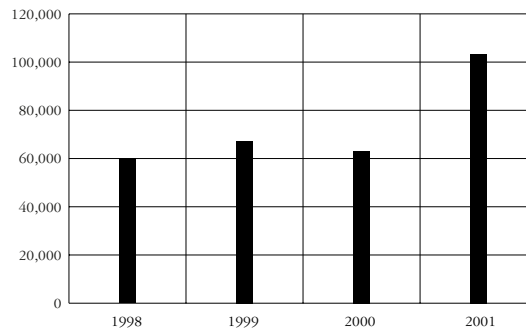
Note: U.S. data not available for this indicator.

Sources: VT Dept. of Social & Rehabilitation Services; VT Dept. of Health (population estimates).

VERMONT'S AVERAGE NUMBER OF MOVES PER CHILD IN SUBSTITUTE CARE



TOTAL BED-NIGHTS FOR PEOPLE HOUSED IN TEMPORARY SHELTERS IN VERMONT



## STORY BEHIND THE HEARTENING CURVES

- Teen pregnancy rates have improved with the help of expanded access to health care for young women, with a heightened attention to the role of males in pregnancy prevention, and with community-based prevention programs.
- 96% of Vermont's children have health insurance coverage with the ability to reach 100% due to expanded eligibility for the Dr. Dynasaur program (families with income up to 300% of poverty level now eligible).
- Child support collections have gone up dramatically, due to a new automated system, legislative changes, increased communication, and coordination with other states.

## STORY BEHIND THE TROUBLING CURVES

- Rates of child abuse and neglect (determined by the number of substantiated cases per child population) have declined over the past few years, but absolute numbers of cases have increased over the past 2 years by 18%. Cases of child abuse and neglect never reported remain too high.
- Children in custody move frequently, because of insufficient numbers of trained and available personnel, including respite providers, therapeutic shelter homes, and mental health workers trained in adolescent and family care.
- Lack of available and affordable housing, mental health services, and livable wage employment opportunities continue to affect those housed in temporary shelters.

### Recommendations in 2000

*Families Live in Safe and Affordable Housing*

*Families Are Supported by Their Communities*

### Accomplishments in 2000

- Parents Together™ support groups were offered in 7 prisons by Prevent Child Abuse Vermont.
- A statewide resource group continues to address needs of incarcerated women: transition homes, transportation, parenting education and support, child care, and parent and child access.

- 8 counties received funding from Green Mountain Network or Children's Upstream Services Family Consortium to expand family networks.

### Recommendations for 2001

*Families Are Supported by Their Communities*

### Actions/Strategies for 2001

- Increase number of services and activities associated with public and private afterschool programs.
- Encourage hiring experienced family members to serve as peer support and mentors.
- Continue to expand family resource consultants to all regions through Vermont Federation of Families.
- Continue efforts to build and sustain inter-agency teams throughout the state to address the needs of parents with disabilities.

**From Data to Evidence to Energy** The evolution in data presentation that we've described here—from point-in-time indicators, to indicator trends over time, to graphic formats with narrative context, to listing multiple indicators, to a listing by degree of change, to one by outcome and degree of change, to the localization of indicator data, to action recommendations—represents successive improvements in using data to energize progress toward well-being. (Vermont's 2002 Profile of Social Well-Being, presented in Appendix C, shows the current status of our indicators.)

Presenting the indicators in creative, thought-provoking ways increases the likelihood that the data will become important tools in the overall strategy.

In our little neighborhood of a state, successive administrations and legislatures have forged a cumulative policy agenda, which serves as a solid foundation for outcomes-and-indicators work. The indicator data over that period document strong, objective improvements in the condition of the children, families, and communities of Vermont. We believe such results are not simply fortuitous. The strong economy of recent years may have played a role in some of these results but cannot provide a full explanation. We believe the reasons are larger.

# Chapter 10:

## RESEARCH AND PUBLIC POLICY

An important component of an outcomes framework is research. We need to identify “what works” to achieve the outcomes. Here we’re talking about “informed policies,” “best practices,” “accumulated wisdom,” and evaluated programs. Terms such as “science-based,” “evidence-based,” “proven,” and so forth, currently are tossed about with more self-styled authority than honesty or clarity. Powerful interests in and out of government hotly debate how narrowly or broadly to construe what’s “in the box.” Sometimes specifying what’s *not* in the box—i.e., what we know *doesn’t* work—can be helpful.

The truth is, research is always provisional—findings are ever-evolving: What is *unproven* today may be *proven* tomorrow, and vice versa. All findings require replication in multiple contexts of place, of population, and of time before they deserve unqualified confidence. Unfortunately, this type of research gets far too little support.

We should rely on the already available research and encourage more. But we also need to rely on the accumulated wisdom of practitioners—so called “best practices.” While generally not subjected to the rigorous scrutiny of classical experimental models of research, nevertheless, best practice is knowledge gained from experience, which anyone would be foolish to ignore. Lisbeth Schorr and others have summarized much of these learnings in terms of “common characteristics of effective programs.”

Equally as silly as relying on the still-tiny corner of practice that has been validated by formal evaluations is the position that anything at all should be in the “what works” box.

**Academic Research and Public Policy** Calls for greater integration of academic research with public policy often sound like obligatory pronouncements, no matter which side issues the challenge. In spite of the

obvious need, too large a gulf often exists—between concepts and, indeed, between worldviews—to bridge these two worlds effectively. Government and academe have different standards for “truth,” different time scales for results, and different audiences for accountability.

Fortunately, that’s changed recently. The change is caused by in part, a new environment within public policy brought on by the outcomes movement. Outcomes force us to define the conditions of well-being, both general and specific. The change is also because of the devolution of accountability to local levels of governance. Devolution, at its best, represents a re-discovery that the people directly receiving and providing services are best positioned to design and implement systems that “work.” That focus renews attention on evaluation, both of process and effect.

As a result of this focus, people who direct public policy need to become researchers or, at least, be cognizant of research about new governance structures, about effective programs and strategies, and about community development, broadly conceived. Yet, few public agencies have the expertise, the tools, or the financial resources for more than a rudimentary research function.

Public policy needs to incorporate research, but the traditional research community also needs to recognize the new policy environment. Certainly, the new policy environment presents ample concepts, which are sorely in need of further definition, validation, and elaboration. Fewer and fewer “pure” programs will exist (i.e., those isolated, by default or design, from a broader context). Increasingly, single programs with impacts that can be evaluated apart from other variables will be difficult to find or design. To engage with the public policy arena, therefore, the research community (and policymakers) will need to adopt greater flexibility, greater respect for uncertainty, and greater willingness to participate in an evolving process.

Here are some other research opportunities posed by the new policy environment.

### *The Outcomes Themselves*

What constitutes well-being, and how can it best be measured? Here, researchers need to call on models of wellness as well as pathology and of resilience as well as risk. Fundamentally, this question raises issues of “values”—a topic that most academics are wary of addressing publicly. Research, however, has already identified some of these components in early brain development, attachment, competence, cognitive style, resilience, and social support.

and local governments, including in Vermont. Additionally, the Rockefeller, Danforth, and Packard Foundations; The Urban Institute; the Harvard Family Research Project; the Princeton University Center for Research on Child Well-Being; the Finance Project; the Center for Study of Social Policy; the Institute for Research on Poverty, the National Center for Children in Poverty; Child Trends; and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are all

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**Devolution, at its best, represents a re-discovery that the people directly receiving and providing services are best positioned to design and implement systems that “work.”**

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### *What Works to Achieve Outcomes?*

As we’ve said, this territory includes both impact evaluations and best practices. Huge gaps exist here: How do we know what worked, and how well? What new tools are needed to evaluate what have been termed “comprehensive community initiatives”? Is our level of analysis the individual (case-level data) or the community (aggregate data) or some combination? To what extent can we inject concepts—such as cost–benefit—which are normally foreign to academic research but critical to a policy perspective?

### *How Do We Translate Research Findings to Communities?*

This task means scaling up to the community-level human development models typically predicated on individuals as the units of analysis or, at most, on relationships among a few individuals. Relatively few examples of this approach exist, although Brönfenbrenner’s social–ecological model is still provocative.<sup>9</sup>

### *National Support for This Work*

Recently, several important “think-tank” initiatives have appeared on the national scene to bridge the great divide between federal or state policy and experiments in community. The Annie E. Casey Foundation is explicitly supporting new relationships between state

studying some aspect of the outcomes—devolution environment at the national or state level.

**New Questions Emerge** As impressive as these efforts are, smaller-scale collaboration at ground level is still needed. Cross-fertilization between those skilled in research and evaluation and those involved in devising or implementing policies and programs can enrich an even broader public.

Working regularly within the unifying framework of outcomes and indicators takes us in new directions. As a result, we ask new questions that can lead new research. We can use the issue of teen smoking to bring this perspective to life.

### *What resources are needed over what period of time to change specific outcomes?*

When we define an outcome as a common purpose to achieve, then a natural question to ask is what resources are needed over what period of time to reach that outcome. The current debate around teen smoking rates in the United States has clearly adopted an investment orientation. A clearly articulated outcome—“Reduce the Rate of Teen Smoking”—has led to discussions regarding the level of per capita investment needed to reduce smoking rates to specific levels. State officials in Maryland, Massachusetts, California, Florida, and



Vermont have asked the investment question and, accordingly, these states are making investments.

*What is the economic and social value of that investment over time?*

The investment question leads to the benefit question: What will be the long-term economic and social value realized if the investment pays off? Increasingly sophisticated calculations about possible benefits over the years have emerged. For example, the best available estimates are that every dollar spent on comprehensive smoking prevention returns two to three dollars in health care and other social costs.

*What is the value of this investment relative to others?*

Once we know the level of investment that can make a difference and then estimate the benefit of that investment, we can consider alternative investments that may lead to the same outcome. What are the elements of the investment, and what are the alternative possibilities? Much of the political push-and-pull is played out at this level. What works best? Smoking cessation programs, or broad-based public education? Keeping cigarettes out of the view of children in stores, or counseling groups? These questions demand cost–benefit answers.

*What can your organization do to improve the well-being of the people it serves?*

This straightforward question engages organizations to think about results. If we have a clear sense of purpose, then this question is easy to answer. Such is the power of outcomes.

## Chapter 11:

### COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

The idea of constructive reciprocity found expression over the past 10 years in the movement toward collaboration across programs and sectors, particularly in community settings. In fact, the concept of collaboration has been used broadly to represent conversation, cooperation, coordination, negotiation, decision making, consensus building, and even streamlining. In so doing, we have stretched its meaning and created false hope.

Nevertheless, the concept of collaboration caught on in many states and in many regional and community settings. Formal collaborations were established, many of them mandated by legislation. Thus, the early rush to collaboration created a considerable degree of structure and a nearly obsessive focus on money. As a result, the common purpose behind the collaboration was left behind. In focusing so much on process, the desired end was often missing. In lieu of goals, other ideas were substituted, such as “better coordination of programs” or “integrated funding flow.”

These are the false gods of government. Focusing our work on the means effectively preempts the hard work of focusing on the ends, the common purpose, the desired outcomes of well-being toward which we all should be working. The strongest relationships all involve close emotional bonds and a degree of mutuality or reciprocity. Indeed, “healthy relationships are built on mutual obligations.”<sup>10</sup>

**Choosing Partners** The worlds of academe and business have tended toward ever-greater specialization of “expertise,” in parallel with human services’ development of self-contained silos of program delivery. In part, this specialist tendency is a consequence of the knowledge explosion and the inability for anyone to retain a comprehensive view of relevant developments.

However, the results are unfortunate for those concerned with maintaining a humane and connected culture.

In the academic world, professional journals are often “closed clubs” where like-trained scholars speak only to each other about issues too arcane for others to care about anyway. Research universities encourage this trend, in part, by providing a forum for the transmittal of “guild” values from one generation to the next. Universities also reward “original” research, too often defined as investigations into obscure corners of already narrowly defined disciplines.

In the business world, where division of labor has proceeded to the *n*th degree, analogous trends reward the expert—defined as one with specialized skills (usually technical) in a specific area (e.g., web site design, IT systems administration).

Generalists are too little valued by either business or academe. The generalists are those with skills that intentionally bridge or synthesize disparate fields of knowledge for a clearer picture of the totality. Their denigration by the specialists is unfortunate, because surely we’ve learned that context is everything and that parts cannot be understood in isolation, only in relation.

The work of outcomes and indicators requires skilled generalists who can make connections, think broadly and holistically, who can appreciate the contributions that disparate fields of knowledge and expertise can make to results that will not be achieved by narrow specialization. Outcomes work requires those who are comfortable switching between one discipline’s “code” and another’s, to assemble the puzzle pieces of human and community development. Outcomes work also requires those who are able and willing to “give away” their expertise to others and who readily accept that “anywhere leads to everywhere.”

**Partnerships of Common Purpose** Our work in Vermont focused precisely on how common purpose functions as the center of gravity for broad-based partnerships. The following examples are partnerships between very different types of organizations. In each

partnership, we’re taking as a given that a state human services agency is one of the partners.

*... With State Departments of Education*

In Vermont and other states, some of the most bitter battles have occurred between human services and education. These two entities control between one-half and two-thirds of Vermont’s budget or, at least, they believe they do. Over time, resources came to be considered “ours” and “theirs.” The struggle over the margins was intense. Yet, those who work in either of these fields recognize that the families and children who are *their* customers are generally the same families and children who are the other’s.

Schools cannot realize their goals of student achievement without systems to ensure that the children have adequate health and nutrition. Nor can families and communities achieve their economic and social goals without a school system that supports skill development and lifelong learning.

State human services agencies and state education departments’ associated school systems can each find roles to play in achieving outcomes, such as “Children Are Ready for School.” Taking an inventory of existing efforts is one example of a practical exercise to develop partnership around this common purpose. Constructing a consolidated “children’s budget,” which outlines the various financial contributions that multiple programs make to this outcome, is another.

In 1990, Con began a partnership with Richard (“Rick”) Mills, the long-serving and highly respected Education Commissioner in Vermont. Con was then a member of Governor-Elect Richard Snelling’s transition team.<sup>11</sup> After the election and before the new administration took office, hearings were held in every government department to develop a baseline of the information needed to construct a budget for the state’s coming fiscal year. After the conclusion of the hearing at the Education Department, Rick approached Con to have a word. Up to this point, they had not met. His message to Con was simple:

*Con, you and I have responsibility, in one way or another, for the same children, and yet our two organizations have a richly deserved reputation for not working together on their behalf. Let's make working together a priority in this new administration.*

A new and powerful partnership on behalf of Vermont's children was thus forged. Over the years, the results of that early partnership reverberated throughout a number of other government agencies and communities in many ways that benefited Vermont's children and families.

*... With Economic Development Organizations*

The common denominator between human services and economic development is work—or, more figuratively,

includes developing indicators that explicitly connect economic development with human development. For example, we might move beyond reporting on high school graduation rates to reporting the percentage of the workforce that received continuing education or training within the last year.

*... With Health Care Systems*

For the most part, health care systems and human service agencies have not been connected in any formal way or even articulated their common purpose. Yet, common purpose between these two systems is easily identified, particularly at the level of specific indicators, such as rates of immunization or malnutrition.

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**Schools cannot realize their goals of student achievement without systems to ensure that the children have adequate health and nutrition. Nor can families and communities achieve their economic and social goals without a school system that supports skill development and lifelong learning.**

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social capital. Economic development is intrinsically tied to workforce development. This connection becomes particularly clear as our economy is increasingly based on technical knowledge, computer skills, and teamwork. These are the new tools of economic development; they are also the fuel for human development. Although we don't typically think of their contributions this way, our human service systems (including education) support competence in specific skill areas, and our economic development systems support the emotional foundations in building relationship. Confidence in dealing with change and an inclination to contribute to one's community are structural underpinnings that any enterprise must have to succeed. To the extent that the workplace offers employees opportunities to enhance their well-being, it is investing as well in family and community well-being.

Forward-thinking economic development organizations already recognize these connections. Identifying possible indicators across both systems is one way to find common ground. The challenge for the future

Access to health care is often cited as an important indicator, although that is less-than-ideal, because access alone does not guarantee good health. Even in this case, however, health care systems may overlook the fact that formal and informal networks of human service agencies are natural gateways for people without previous access. Partnerships with community-based service systems could prove reciprocally beneficial. Existing examples include home-visiting programs for families with newborns and the development of immunization registries.

*... With State Universities*

We've already spoken about some of the challenges (and opportunities) in engaging with academe. Universities are different from most organizations. Despite their size, they are the least hierarchical; accordingly, they often have unclear lines of responsibility. Their governance structure is not well understood and is generally unwieldy. Boards of trustees, particularly for public universities, experience considerable turnover. Consensus or continuing deliberation

are their means of moving forward. Individual university departments are quite independent. Typical conflicts among departments stem from differences in language, training, education, academic models, and dispersion of authority. Faculty senates wield considerable power to balance central administrations. Such decentralized entities are usually slow to change.

Therefore, partnerships with universities are often extremely difficult, except when such partnerships involve single academic disciplines. Within one field, universities can be excellent partners in research. Partnerships that involve multiple disciplines are more difficult to achieve, unless such partnerships become formalized within the university structure. Thus, for a university to enter a partnership with a state human services agency is no easy task. However, by first adopting a framework of common purpose, multi disciplinary partnerships with universities can thrive.

An example is “Youth Choose Healthy Behaviors.” That common purpose cuts across many academic disciplines and university departments as well as a number of human services programs. Once common purpose is clearly articulated and buy-in from all partners is obtained, then the process of building cooperation can flourish, whether led by the university or by state government.

**Regional Partnerships and State–Community Teams** Out in our communities is where outcomes work really succeeds or fails. Let’s recall that, in the “reinvented government” model:

*entrepreneurial governments ... decentralize authority, embracing participatory management. ... (T)hey focus not simply on providing public services, but on catalyzing all sectors—public, private, and voluntary—into action to solve their community’s problems.”<sup>12</sup>*

In their own words, Vermont’s Regional Partnerships are:

*collaborative groups formed to improve the well-being of children, families, and individuals, and to make their communities healthier places to live. (Their function) is*

*that of planning and decision-making for the development and implementation of local strategies to achieve our adopted outcomes. Regional Partnerships are intermediaries, capable of bridging the missions and resources of current governmental structures at both the state and local levels with the commitment, assets, and energy of all citizens. Participants on the Regional Partnerships include consumers, citizens, family members, non-profit and state providers of health, education, and human services, economic development representatives, and business leaders, among others.*

*To improve the well-being of all Vermonters, the Regional Partnerships and the State Team will work together to:*

- Support services that are preventative, easily accessible, neighborhood based, comprehensive, and family friendly across informal and formal networks;
- Influence funding and other resources in a way that supports a more flexible, individualized approach and that provides for greater control over financial and other resources at the local level;
- Establish methods of accountability for overall improvements in the well-being of communities;
- Create and support new ways of doing business with the present partners;
- Create opportunities for looking at our communities in a holistic way, building new relationships;
- And linking community economic development with human services.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Development and Structure*

In Vermont, our regional partnerships developed in many instances out of existing regional collaboratives. This only makes sense; it’s folly to create yet another structure without good justification. So, we built on groups like our “local interagency teams,” organized to provide integrated services to families facing imminent loss of custody of their children; our “Success By Six” coalitions, overseeing a number of early childhood services; and others.

There is a great deal of diversity across our regional partnerships, but in general (as indicated earlier) they include district directors of state agencies (in particular, welfare, child welfare, and health); representatives of the schools; people from a number of community-based agencies (such as community mental health, and youth service bureaus); often, representatives of workforce development groups, including colleges and technical schools; health care providers (such as a regional hospital); and, to some extent, “just plain folks”—parents, business owners, committed citizens. What brings them to yet another “table”?—an acknowledgment that the community vision expressed by the outcomes is achievable only by a group that takes responsibility for “the big picture.”

One of the pitfalls that partnerships may fall into in their early stages of development is a nearly obsessive focus on money, structure, and power. These are arenas where, ultimately, there are few winners. Our general advice here is to adopt a “form follows function” approach. Simply put, the form and structure of the organization should be a function of the primary indicators around which it is organized. This is important, because the focus and the appropriate community collaborations can change over time, depending on the partnership’s success or failure in turning the curve on specific indicators. As that focus changes, the organization needs to be flexible enough to change with it. As issues change, the people who come to the table often are different. “Maximum flexibility” should be the watchword when creating local organizational structure.

In government, in our experience, once a formal structure is put together, there is nothing harder to undo. Formal structure should be created almost as a last resort.

Another concern related to structure is the diversity, from place to place, of the developmental course of community partnerships. Not only are the outcomes that will be addressed different, but so are the capacities of partnerships to put together the right players and strategies. Creating “cookie cutter” structures does

not take into account the idiosyncratic nature of the work in different regions.

Perhaps the most powerful tool community partnerships can apply is to continue to ask the question, “What can the partnership do to improve the well-being of people in our area?”

#### *Roles and Risks*

While we’ve argued against imposing excessive structure, local governance partnerships are inherently fragile entities, because they are typically ad hoc creations outside the traditional governmental structures. Much can be written about the “care and feeding” of such partnerships; certainly, there are predictable developmental stages that such organizations typically pass through (see Appendixes E and F), and sometimes, unfortunately, repeat. Their roles, ideally, are many; the challenges they face are also many. Thus, we’ll deal with them together.

**Convening: With What Legitimacy?** We’ve already alluded to what is perhaps the most important role of a partnership—that of “convener.” Mark Friedman talks about this in terms of helping to “set tables”: a table for early childhood issues, for instance; another for teen substance abuse, a third for elder care issues. The “tables” reflect the current priorities of the partnership. A well-functioning partnership knows the regional players critical to invite to these tables, provides a forum for their work, including assistance with indicator data and best-practices research; and allows a table to disband or regroup according to need.

However, this function often surfaces the challenge of “legitimacy”: Turf issues die hard in many cases, and with no formal authority over anyone, a partnership relies only on its “good offices” to gain such participation. And it requires only one “resistor,” in some cases, to doom any prospects for progress. This is governance (not traditional government) “outside the box,” with all the advantages and perils that innovative models in any realm face.



**Change Laboratories: Whose Agenda?** Another partnership function, then, is to be a regional laboratory for change—change in the configuration and delivery of services, change in other ways of doing business, financing, budgeting, providing training, and so on. Precisely because such partnerships exist outside the traditional structures, they can attempt (at least) some new directions, with relatively little risk. Where they are successful, they can point the way for other regions, or even the state as a whole, to follow.

Such regional experimentation, however, does require resources, and as long as partnerships receive some form of state or county aid, there are inevitable conflicts over agendas. The state rightly sees the regional partnerships as the preferred vehicles for implementing *its* agenda: seeing that all eligible children are covered by Medicaid, for example, or instituting new responses to juvenile offenders. Even assuming that the partnerships share these concerns, the result is quickly a more-than-full plate for the partnerships. This tension between state and regional priorities becomes a continual negotiation that can in itself siphon scarce resources of time and energy.

Nevertheless, there are a few generalizations we can make about respective roles and responsibilities of regional partnerships and state or county government. Developing partnerships need a modest amount of “glue” money, or convening money, which allows them to bring the right partners to a regularly set table of discussion focused on an outcome. It is appropriate for the state to provide a partnership with modest funding for meeting notices, light snacks for early evening meetings at the end of a workday, and some money for special projects, which should not require a level of review out of proportion to the dollars spent.

In addition, it is reasonable for the state to expect that when grants are provided to local partnerships, outcomes and indicators should be part of the contracts. Any local partnership should have at least one or two fundamental outcomes and associated indicators around which it is organizing its effort. The state or county is generally in the best position to provide the

appropriate indicator data, at the level of the local jurisdiction, and to be able to array those data over time.

**True Coordination, or Rubber Stamp?** A third, “clearinghouse” function of partnerships can be to bring some measure of coherence to the typically dozens of proposals floated annually in the search for continued funding for social programs. Public and private funders can require, for example, that partnerships review proposals from their region, to help minimize duplication and enhance alignment of efforts, or to help ensure a degree of geographic equity of assistance across the region.

However appealing in concept, though, this role is especially challenging. It is not apparent that a “coordinated strategy” will in every case make for more success in funds seeking—at least in the short term. There may be elements of “the prisoner’s dilemma” here, where entrenched “zero-sum” strategies prevail over “win-win” ones, regardless of their rationality. Moreover, to perform this “clearinghouse” function well requires a partnership to understand a great deal about how the various pieces should (or could) fit together in the region; to do otherwise is to risk having this be simply a “rubber-stamping” function. Yet another task for a poorly resourced entity.

#### *Leading: Top-Down and Bottom-Up*

The development of Vermont’s outcomes work reflects the reciprocity between top-down and bottom-up leadership. There is no substitute for having key, statewide policymakers emphasize the kind of shared framework that the outcomes provide. On the other hand, time and again we have seen our communities provide the “push” for the state to move forward with this agenda. “All politics is local” has become a timeworn phrase, but its implication—that the locus of social change is, in many cases, at the community level—is still provocative.

Certainly, the impetus in Vermont for providing local indicator data came from our communities. Following the publication of our first state *Kids Count Data Book* (in 1994), one of the early questions from users was, “Can we get this information at a subcounty level?”



Vermont is one of those states where counties have very little practical significance; counties have no governmental authority (other than hosting sheriffs and courts), and neither education or social services are organized along county lines. Instead, it is towns, or groups of towns, that are the “natural” units with which communities identify themselves. So, naturally, the desire was for data that were aligned with such realities.

However, by no means was it “natural” for Vermont’s state agencies (who provided data for the majority of the Kids Count indicators) to provide town-level data. Instead, as we suspect is the case in most states, departments offered a variety of reasons why this couldn’t be done: It would compromise privacy, computer systems would have to be reprogrammed, town information was not collected, and so forth. In the end (and this was a case where top-level leadership was critical), many did provide town-level data, although in other cases we had to be content with county-level data (even this required some effort, as some departments’ data were organized, not even by county but by idiosyncratic districts).

But it was communities’ loud-and-clear request for useful information that drove this process.

each other. Over the past seven or so years, Vermont’s partnerships have convened around topics including results-based accountability, building local economic sustainability, systems theory, and asset-building.

*The Essential Roles of a “State–Community” Team*

Vermont’s “State Team for Children, Families, and Individuals” is the statewide overseer of the outcomes framework and provides a forum to ensure that the regional partnerships and state leaders are informed of each other’s work.

*The State Team’s current membership consists of the Division Directors of state agencies that serve children, families and individuals, state-level coordinators of inter-agency teams, directors of several major service and advocacy organizations, people from higher education institutions, parents, and the coordinators of our 12 Regional Partnerships. The State Team is responsible for supporting the development of the Regional Partnerships.”<sup>14</sup>*

In many ways, Vermont’s State Team is as innovative (and therefore fragile) as our partnerships. With no formal (i.e., statutory) authority, its meetings are open to all who wish to attend; in spite (or because) of this

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**Perhaps the most powerful tool community partnerships can apply is to continue to ask the question, “what can the partnership do to improve the well-being of people in our area?”**

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Similarly, communities know best what they need as far as training and technical assistance; sometimes this has been provided by state personnel; in other cases, the state has functioned more like a “broker,” arranging for the services of a variety of specialist consultants. In either case, working through the local partnerships natural hosts for this learning.

*Peer-to-Peer Learning*

One benefit to having a network of regional partnerships, each in different stages of organizational maturity, and each facing some challenges distinctive to its geographic area, is that there are ready opportunities for them to come together to learn with and from

lack of structure, it has established a great deal of credibility through its work. Meeting monthly, it reviews the outcomes in turn over the course of two years. It produces an annual planning document that highlights “heartening” and “troubling” indicators, provides brief explanations for these trends, and recommends concrete action steps for the coming year.

In addition to what we’ve already noted, we see some of the important functions of such a state- or county-wide coordinating body as follows:

- Acts as “keeper” of the outcomes and their indicators. This is the body not only to review systematically progress toward the outcomes

but periodically to review the framework itself: adding or deleting indicators, for example, as data systems or priorities change.

- *Constantly communicates the outcomes and indicators to local collaboratives.* Outcomes frame this kind of work, quite literally: They should be where collaboratives begin and where their attention continually returns. The state team helps them keep their “eyes on the prize.” In addition to our regional partnerships, we have a number of more-local partnerships. The state team also encourages these to articulate their work within the outcomes framework.
- *Functions as an intermediary between the partnerships and senior managers of state agencies.* In Vermont, the state team includes middle-level agency representatives, who help make the connection, for their superiors, between formalized agency programs and the often-decentralized and varied activities of the regional collaboratives.
- *Examines local results for important themes.* Another aspect of systematic review is to note candidly, for each region, the indicators where they are showing progress as well as those where they are not.
- *Identifies training and professional development opportunities.* The work of these new governance entities is largely uncharted territory.<sup>15</sup> Thus, a measure of autodidactic “bootstrapping” is often necessary. Groups identify what expertise they need—community assessment, data management, strategic planning, budgeting, public relations—then find someone who can share it with them.
- *Highlights local promising strategies and other “success stories.”* A feature of many state team meetings is presentations of exemplary programs or activities, often confined to a particular region, but which could be replicated or adapted elsewhere.
- *Creates opportunity for face-to-face relationship-building across diverse sectors.* This may be the most important function of all. The state team meetings are a time when all participate on an

equal basis, focusing on the outcomes of their work, hearing how people in other communities are addressing their concerns, posing questions or identifying problems and having a chance to think about them communally. This back-and-forth flow of information and ideas helps build a sense of shared responsibility and continually raises the expectations we have of our work together.

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13. Description created by Vermont’s Regional Partnerships for the “Connections” web site, [www.ahs.state.vt.us/Connections](http://www.ahs.state.vt.us/Connections).
14. Description from Vermont’s “Connections” web site: [www.ahs.state.vt.us/Connections](http://www.ahs.state.vt.us/Connections).
15. As outcomes-based work spreads and matures, however, we are beginning to see the development of practical “road maps” that aim to capture some of the accumulated knowledge of seasoned practitioners. See, for example, the *Learning Guides* produced by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, [www.cssp.org](http://www.cssp.org).

## The Dynamics of the Process

The dynamics of the change process need direction. Clear articulation of common purpose can provide that. For decades now, our nation has let the need for common purpose slip by without coming to terms with what we want to achieve for our people. The more time goes by, the more urgent is our need, yet the more difficult articulating common purpose becomes. How then do we motivate performance toward better results? Improved performance seldom results, for example, from funding based on inputs, whereas funding based on outcomes typically leads to management being “obsessive” about performance.<sup>1</sup> Such is the power of outcomes.

The following examples—one of a town and another of a family—are at two very different scales, but they each illustrate how common purpose can be applied to steer positive change.

Here’s how one town did it.

**An Integrated Approach** In Barre, Vermont, a number of important indicators were troubling. Barre was invited to join several other communities across the nation in a community-building effort sponsored by the Danforth Foundation. A steering committee was formed to oversee what would become a multiyear agenda to address some of the city’s long-standing problem areas. One of the first decisions was to select a theme—an outcome, really. The choice was “Learning for Life.” This theme encompassed efforts to promote early literacy as well as lifelong investment in learning. Next, town leaders approached a number of foundations and the federal government for resources and received a positive response.

That success energized their efforts. Obtaining grants and contracts was something that all members of the steering committee knew how to do. Yet coming together in the Danforth process was instrumental in increasing leverage for new community resources. The common purpose inherent in the “Learning for Life” framework gave their funding applications a stronger and more integrated appeal.

The Danforth Steering Committee became the public venue for a variety of groups and organizations to share their hopes and plans.

- In June 1999, the steering committee heard plans to establish a roller-blade and skate-board park for greater Barre.
- The steering committee supported a grant to establish a Cyber Café on Main Street, giving young people without computers access to the Internet and the world of computing.
- The steering committee also supported a sizable grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to reduce youth violence and delinquency—one indicator that was not improving.

The total resources brought to Barre over the period from 1996 to 2000 was in excess of \$1.2 million, an extraordinary amount of money for a town of only 10,000 citizens. Funders expressed their appreciation at receiving proposals that were so integrated in their approach. They also appreciated how the steering committee went to great lengths to support other community organizations, which in the past would have gone their own way. The strategy of using the Danforth Steering Committee as an information clearinghouse and using the Danforth name in the grant applications were important to Barre’s overall success in gaining resources (see Appendix D for the fuller Barre story).

The integrated face that an outcomes-based application presents is a winning proposition.

**A Simple Application** A different kind of example about the integrating function of outcomes can be appreciated at a case management level. A technique used widely in Vermont is MAPS, the Magill Action Planning Steps. Essentially, MAPS begins by having human services workers meet with a family. In itself, that feature is common to many case management models. However, MAPS distinguishes itself by how it uses outcomes and indicators to help the family.

On a large wall chart, the family and service providers sketch the family's dreams for itself (the desired outcomes). Then, together, they systematically inventory the barriers to those dreams (some specific indicators).

In a MAPS session with a family in Morrisville, one barrier listed was the material clutter in their living space. Although small in quantitative terms, this barrier had a large qualitative effect, which contributed to a high level of family disorganization and tension. To "clear the clutter," the service providers pooled a small amount of money and arranged to bring a Dumpster to the home. With the help of the family and several volunteers, a considerable amount of trash was removed over the course of a weekend. An immediate change was apparent not only in the appearance of the household but also in its organization. Now, family members had room to move about, had some private areas, and no longer had to continually compete with each other for space.

Just as an integrated perspective can serve an organization or, as in the previous Barre example, a town, the same applies to families. Identifying this family's fundamental needs simply would not have happened using the typical casework model to which service workers have become accustomed.

## Chapter 12:

### EXEMPLARS OF OUTCOMES WORK

Certain types of human services activities are ideally suited for an outcomes approach. These involve partners from several service disciplines and address multiple rather than single issues. Therefore, they present multiple points of leverage in pursuit of well-being.

**Supporting Families With Home Visits** Home visiting serves many purposes. In some cases, it is appropriately designed for families with the severest challenges. In Vermont, we've learned that the benefits of home visits extend to nearly all new families having a first baby. Through these visits, families learn about available services for parents and children within their communities. Information sharing may not seem revolutionary, but with the plethora of services, programs, and agencies in existence, getting a referral firsthand can be important.

In addition, visits timed around the arrival of a newborn can help connect new families with other families. Connecting families in this way can rebuild socially fragile neighborhoods. Early baby visits allow local service agencies and nonprofit organizations to connect with families much earlier. Many families live without typical social support systems, even in areas of high population density. A home visit can help decrease the isolation they feel. We know that social isolation is a factor that can lead to poor outcomes for children and families. The "Making Connections" initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which is working over the long term with 22 difficult and challenged communities, is familiar with the problems faced by families "unconnected" to support networks. Early baby visits are one way to achieve leverage for improved outcomes in the life of a family.<sup>2</sup>

One of the simplest results that early baby visits can achieve is to get children enrolled in health care.

Although having health insurance is not the same as having good health, statistically the two are strongly related. Having 8 million children in the United States without access to health care should impel us to find ways to bridge this gap. Helping a family work through enrollment procedures involving complicated choices can make a fundamental difference in their child's life. Indeed, early baby visits can also discover adults who are either uninsured or underinsured and eligible for additional health care coverage.

Home visits can also promote family literacy. Are there books in the home? Do parents read to their children? Too often the answers are "no." Home visitors provide opportunities for confidential conversations with family members, in this instance about the importance of reading to a baby. They can explain the benefits not only for language development but also for emotional bonding between parent and child that reading together fosters. Moreover, at this sensitive period—when all new parents want the best for their newborn—many adults are motivated to improve their own literacy skills. If necessary, a volunteer might be found to read to the baby, or parents might join literacy self-help groups.

course of conversation, home visitors can easily find out the approximate age of the house. In homes built before the mid-1970s, the likelihood of lead-based paint is high. From there, inspecting a few windows can reveal any chipping paint. If necessary, the visitor can initiate a conversation about how paint chips become pulverized over time and then are easily inhaled or ingested by a baby or toddler in whom lead poisoning can result in serious neurological damage. These discussions can lead to blood testing to determine a child's lead level, as well as to specific measures to reduce the hazard. Attention to these issues early in a child's life can avoid the serious consequences if intervention happens only later or not at all.

**The Crucial Role of Health Care** The problem of access to health care is worst for children. As mentioned earlier, in 2000, 8.5 million children in the United States were not covered by health insurance. Many families do not know that their children are eligible. Others find the enrollment process too complex, unfriendly, and often demeaning. More user-friendly enrollment is critical for solving the lack of health care coverage for too many of our children.

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**Children without health insurance are less likely to have a regular source of health care. Their parents are also more likely to delay seeking care when needed, because they are worried about how to pay for it.**

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A focus on literacy can also engage partners from other sectors of society, such as the business community. In Vermont, the Business Roundtable raised the equivalent of about \$1 per resident to provide "Born to Read" gift packages, consisting of an assortment of children's books for early baby visits.<sup>3</sup> Business sees this as an investment for the future, because support for reading helps develop tomorrow's workforce and a literate society.

This model emphasizes prevention. Working together with new families, service agencies use this opportunity to prevent problems instead of learning of them once they have become entrenched. An example is screening for the presence of lead in the home. In the normal

Children without health insurance are less likely to have a regular source of health care. Their parents are also more likely to delay seeking care when needed, because they are worried about how to pay for it. Therefore, those not covered are unlikely to have had a recent doctor visit. More likely, they have used an emergency room for routine health care. For children who do have coverage, recent studies show a high degree of instability among their insurers. In fact, one-third of all children have experienced a change in health care coverage within a single year. This instability carries unacceptable costs.

Remarkably, these conditions occur at the same time that more than three-fourths of Americans favor expanded health insurance coverage. Access to health care represents one of the most important contributors to improved well-being. With a national will to do so, we could meet the challenge of gaining access for 100 percent of our children. Articulating this common purpose—"All Children Have Health Care Coverage"—could rapidly address the current shameful situation and bring progress on many associated indicators of well-being.<sup>4</sup>

**A More Realistic View of Education** Education is another factor fundamental to well-being—perhaps the most important influence on the future of our youth. Yet, despite agreement on the importance of education, national dismay over the current state of our schools persists. Have we been asking too much of our schools?

One strategic error is to expect schools to bear the major responsibility for the success or failure of our young people, while ignoring the education happening beyond our school walls. Other huge influences on children may outweigh any possible contribution of the education institution itself.

For example, we are learning that nutritional habits formed in the first few months of life have implications for lifelong health. Likewise, the attachment between mother and child in the first hours, days, and months of life has great importance for the well-being of each. The brain activity of the young child in response to stimulation, newly revealed through image resonance techniques, has awakened our appreciation for the lasting impact of early experiences.

We rely unduly on educational institutions to raise healthy children. The deterioration of relationships, in our homes and in society, should also be our focus. We have divorce rates approaching 50 percent, apparently shrinking time for family and friends, a growing depersonalization created by mass-market entertainment, and a spreading isolation stemming from the increasing use of personal technology. In turn, the nurturing of

intimate, supportive, human relationships has suffered. These threats are subtle. They accumulate so gradually that, for many of us, the change goes unnoticed. Only when we contemplate the cumulative erosion do we realize that major changes in how we lead our lives have occurred over a relatively short period of time.

Improving the quality of our education system is important. Nevertheless, we need to spend at least as much time and energy on improving the quality of our human relationships. More learning takes place outside of classrooms than inside. Indeed, these "incidental" experiences often make formal schooling more effective. The more that children are ready to learn by the time they reach school age, the more successful they will be as students.

**The Effects of Welfare on Well-Being** In our society, income or its absence is responsible for steering well-being in positive or negative directions. We were fortunate that the national welfare reform legislation of 1996 occurred during the longest and strongest positive economic expansion in our nation's history. The results were spectacular. Numbers of cash assistance recipients declined by nearly half. In some parts of the country, welfare caseloads dropped by more than 75 percent. Most former welfare recipients now have jobs.

The predicted "race to the bottom" among the states and an associated disaster for well-being did not occur. Wages rose, because the existing labor force could not meet the demands of employers. Further opportunities are ahead as a proportion of the working poor find better jobs with higher compensation, creating more opportunities for those just behind them. This performance has exceeded even the most optimistic projections at the time of welfare reform's enactment.

Because of reductions in the welfare caseload, states had considerable cash available from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grants. By and large, states have invested these funds in child care, transportation, job training, and other important supports for those entering the job market.



Positive, cumulative change came to most states as a result of welfare reform. In Vermont, we refocused “welfare” issues into a broader vision for the well-being of the working poor. In 2000, Vermont’s legislature passed a bill that raised the minimum wage consistent with a livable income for people who “play by the rules.” Along with most Americans, we believe that, if people work 40 hours a week, they should benefit by having opportunities for further personal and family development.

For the most part, welfare reform in Vermont and in the rest of the nation benefited many groups. Among those were former recipients of assistance who entered the workforce; businesses who drew on this new pool of workers during a tight job market; state and federal coffers that gained additional resources; and, most importantly, children, as levels of poverty, child abuse, and teen pregnancy dropped substantially.

Welfare is an example of an issue that, while addressed initially at a programmatic level, over time evolved to a higher level of common purpose across multiple systems. Welfare reform has truly changed the nation’s conversation about the poor. The forthcoming reauthorization of the welfare reform bill presents the next important opportunity.

**The Importance of Equity** We can apply the lessons learned as a result of welfare reform more broadly. An important shift that needs to occur is to help all people, but particularly the working poor, achieve improved economic circumstances and greater participation in American life.

Now that many of poor people are working, we ought to recognize that achievement and their contribution to the vibrancy of our economy and to the lives of all Americans. In the name of fundamental equity, people who work and contribute to our community deserve a better quality of life. If necessary, they should receive the developmental supports that allow them to learn more, earn more, and create fuller lives for themselves and their children. If they do, the nation will only be stronger.

Even as the most recent prosperity gained momentum, we knew that all did not benefit. In the mid-1990s, corporate executives gave extraordinary compensation to themselves, amounts that defy any apparent logic of incentive or reward. While these 7- to 10-digit salaries affected relatively few members of our society, most Americans would have thought that the working poor and near-poor would benefit proportionally in the distribution of income gains during this prosperous time. Such was not the case.

A recent analysis<sup>6</sup> by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the Economic Policy Institute examined income data over the past two decades. After adjusting for the impact of inflation, the income of the top fifth of the population improved by 30 percent in the 1980s and 1990s, while the income of the bottom fifth *declined* by 6 percent over the same period. If not for the success in moving people from welfare to work in the 1990s, the lower 20 percent would have lost even more ground.

Both enhancement of proven strategies and development of new ones are needed to reach the next level of prosperity—one that is more equitably shared.

- Analyses have shown that the federal earned income tax credit (EITC), which has broad political support, contributes greatly to reducing poverty. In a strong economy, the EITC represents even greater opportunity as an important incentive for the working poor. A number of states offer their own EITCs in addition to the federal program.
- Child care is a particularly problematic issue for the working poor. These families spend 20 percent or more of their budgets on child care. Tax policies that support this essential need of working families can create new opportunities for those who have not yet entered the workforce because of the expense of child care.
- The cost of health care can be at least 15 percent of a working poor family’s annual budget. Improved access to health insurance, particularly for the working poor, is again on the

nation's political agenda. Many analysts believe that a by-product of welfare-to-work policy has been a decline in overall access to health care, because many small employers cannot afford to offer health insurance to their workers. If so, this trend must be reversed.

- Other important strategies are equity building in housing policy, government-matched savings accounts, restructuring training and education programs, and greater use of technology as a leveler and lifter of opportunities. Such strategies are emerging to help the working poor become stronger participants and beneficiaries in the new economy.

Many organizations are interested in pursuing this larger agenda. The foundation community is actively working to strengthen families, enroll children in health care, and encourage communities to improve the economic circumstances of their citizens.

Increasing numbers of state governments, along with the National Governors Association, are working to improve their capacities to better serve families in poorer economic circumstances. Reassessment of what constitutes a livable family income provides a new lens for examining the persistent issue of poverty in the United States.

The National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University is organizing a nationwide, broad-based discussion on pursuing a national policy to lift people out of poverty—not only the working poor, but all poor people. Many United Way organizations, community foundations, and businesses across the nation are being enlisted to help shape this agenda.

Timing is important in the process of change. The unusual alignment of common interests urges us to move beyond welfare reform to a more comprehensive vision for the working poor, a large and historically underserved population. The time has come to reshape our national, state, and local policies so that the poor in America can enrich their lives.

## Chapter 13:

### THE SYNERGY OF INTERCONNECTIONS

Interconnectedness is an inherent characteristic of life—biological life and community life. No surprise, then, that an outcomes-and-indicator framework abounds with interconnections. Anywhere can lead to anywhere else, which leads to everywhere. Recognizing the interactivity among indicators as well as among outcomes provides a new perspective on human services work, one that illuminates the opportunities for progress.

Social indicators, which reflect our health and well-being, have a high degree of interactivity. For example, reduced numbers of teen pregnancies will reduce welfare caseloads, may lower child abuse rates, and could decrease the incidence of childhood lead poisoning. In this respect, their interconnectedness is distinctly synergistic. That is, change in one indicator can lead to change in another, which affects still other changes. As a result, improvement in one indicator is often linked to improvement in others. In combination, they can spell significant improvement in overall well-being. Synergy is more than a domino effect. It's more like a nuclear reaction—although a contained one.

**Indicator Pathways** From Wall Street, we often hear of “leading” and “lagging” indicators. We believe that something similar applies here. The interactivity of an outcomes-and-indicators framework leads us to speculate whether a preferred or optimal pathway exists among indicators, leading to improved outcomes overall.

In truth, an optimal pathway toward a particular outcome through all potential indicators is virtually impossible to trace. One difficulty is that some indicators typically tracked are inputs (money, staff, materials, activities, programs), and others are tracked as outputs (results, improved health, more jobs). Worse, many are

both inputs and outputs, depending on the outcome of reference. For example, the high school graduation rate is an *output* indicator for the outcome “Children Succeed in School” but would be considered an *input* indicator for the outcome “Youth Successfully Transition to Adulthood.”

Because of the interconnections, no single optimal pathway to an outcome exists. Instead, there are multiple—even unlimited—pathways.

We do know that change in one indicator, desired or otherwise, is frequently followed by changes in others. For example, to understand the dynamics behind infant mortality probably means we also have to understand

ment in these and other indicators. That associated improvement will be to a greater or lesser degree, as the level and impact of interdependence varies.

A related characteristic of these interconnections is that, over time, they cut across organizational lines. The winding and cumulative pathways in relation to outcomes will systematically connect the work of many organizations. If we identify one or two outcomes on which to focus, they will take us to a set of interconnected indicators that criss-cross organizational boundaries. Accumulating improvement in these indicators will implicate the work of multiple agencies and community initiatives.

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**Because of the interconnections, no single optimal pathway to an outcome exists. Instead, there are multiple—even unlimited—pathways.**

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the dynamics behind smoking rates among pregnant women. Smoking rates may well be related to education levels, education levels are connected to teen pregnancy and dropout rates; and dropout rates are connected to child abuse rates. If child abuse rates are increasing, a good chance exists that teen pregnancy rates are also rising. If such rates continue to rise, then one consequence will be increased costs associated with providing for parenting teens and their children, which can amount to tens of millions of dollars. So this interactivity is important. Clearly, “the neck bone is connected to the leg bone.”

Regardless of the particular indicator on which we focus our efforts, we will eventually find ourselves working on a number of related indicators. Examples abound.

We see this interactivity, not as overwhelming, but as reassuring. We will never have enough resources to work on all indicators at the same time, let alone garner the political support for major increases in social spending. Nevertheless, because of the interconnectivity of outcomes work, we can concentrate on improving one or two troubling indicators and inevitably see improve-

*Starting Anywhere*

Community well-being can be achieved through many pathways.

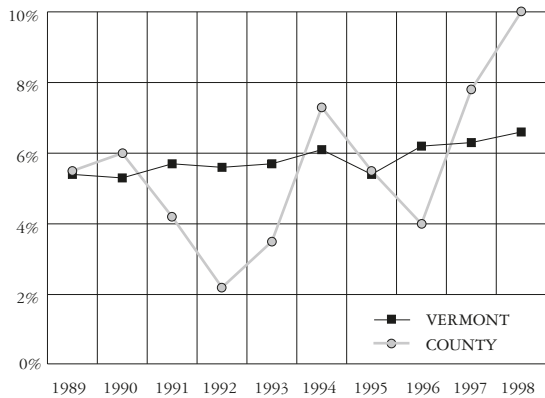
Indicators used in an outcomes framework are one way to describe those pathways. A similar line of thought was developed in an elegant book, *The Tipping Point*,<sup>7</sup> which examined declining crime rates in New York City. The author persuasively argued that, at some point in time (the “tipping point”), an accumulation of small improvements in a number of indicators reaches a critical mass, which as a consequence creates qualitatively new results. Once the tipping point is reached, other indicators follow, thus accelerating overall improvement in well-being.

Beginning an outcomes-effort by focusing attention on a single indicator does not mean that this indicator is necessarily the most important or most relevant one. The idea behind tackling a particular indicator is to begin a pathway through the interconnections, which then leads to a more comprehensive strategy. No indicator stands alone. A complex—although insufficiently understood—set of interconnections among indicators weaves them into a web of relations.

How does an indicator serve as a pathway to the development of well-being? Take low birth weight in one county in comparison with the state's rate.

Assume the two rates track closely for six or seven years. Then, abruptly, the local indicator shows a significant increase that continues over the next three years.

PERCENTAGE LOW BIRTH WEIGHT

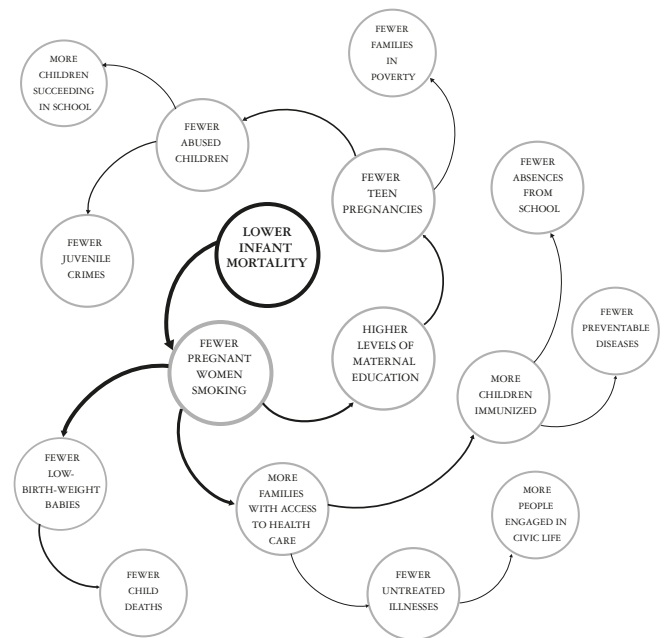


At that point, the task would be to engage a range of partners in the state, share with them the divergent data, and then offer the challenge, “How can we all work together to contribute to the improvement of low birth weight in this region?” Such a conversation will quickly get into other subjects, such as smoking during pregnancy, health care practices, health insurance coverage, and a variety of interconnected issues. If addressed, these topics will necessarily involve looking at additional indicators.

Because indicators have this interdependence, progress in one or more indicators will lead, over time, to progress in others, thus creating a kind of “critical mass”—that is, a threshold sufficient to attract still more positive change.

*Anywhere Leads to Everywhere*

The most obvious set of interconnections among indicators is the developmental logic, “one thing leads to another.” If we could make systematic progress, for example, on one indicator (“Fewer Pregnant Women Smoking”) associated with the indicator “Lower Infant Mortality,” progress would be reflected in additional indicators, such as “More Access to Health Care,” “Higher Education Levels,” and “Fewer Low-Birth-Weight Babies.” Before long, progress would show in other outcomes and indicators, such as “More Children Immunized,” “Fewer Teen Pregnancies,” and “Fewer Child Deaths.” Eventually, progress would also be apparent in “Fewer Families in Poverty,” “Fewer Untreated Illnesses,” “Fewer Abused Children,” and “Fewer Absences From School.” Then, we could address dropout rates, mothers’ educational attainment, and other allied indicators, and so on. If we can get a set of related indicators flowing in the right direction, the laws of inertia direct other indicators into the flow and the critical mass that develops substantially advances community well-being.



Given the interconnectedness of an outcomes-and-indicators framework, some may be tempted to ask, “Why can’t we engage simultaneously with all the indicators?” The answer is simple: We don’t have the resources, the time, or the energy. Even if we did, such an effort would be overwhelming.

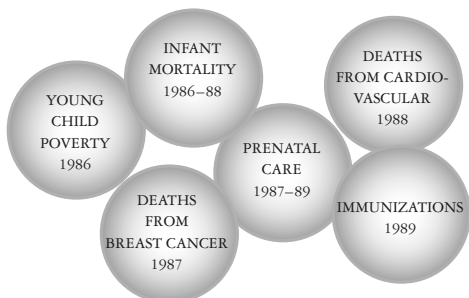
Ironically, a perceived lack of resources is usually given as the reason why change efforts don’t work. However, the more common problem of government is trying to fund all its programs to the maximum. The advantage of an interconnected framework means that, when we make progress on one indicator, we make progress on others as well.

**How Outcomes and Indicators Have Accumulated in Vermont** To pursue the analogy from molecular physics, improving indicators attract one another and consolidate, developing critical mass and gravity. This gravity pulls even more ideas, resources, and energy into the mass, thus enhancing the capacity of the combined effects to improve well-being in other areas. The the following series of graphics shows the indicators that changed through Vermont’s outcomes efforts starting back in the mid-1980s.

*Earliest Improving Indicators*

Several indicators began to improve relatively early on. Specifically, during the mid-1980s, Vermont began to see improvements in:

- Early prenatal care
- Infant mortality
- Young child poverty
- Early childhood immunization rates
- Deaths from cardiovascular disease
- Breast cancer deaths.

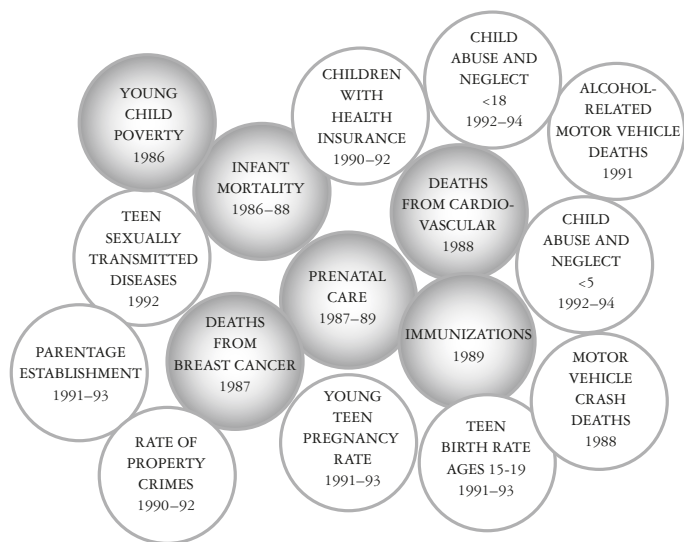


Nearly all of these early improving indicators were health related. Many related to state policies that were designed to take advantage of new funding options in the national Medicaid program.

*The Next Set of Improving Indicators*

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Vermont saw improvements in the next set of indicators:

- Property crime
- Teen birth
- Child abuse and neglect
- Young teen pregnancy
- Children with health insurance
- Teen sexually transmitted diseases
- Motor vehicle crash deaths, including alcohol-related deaths
- Parentage established for out-of-wedlock child support.



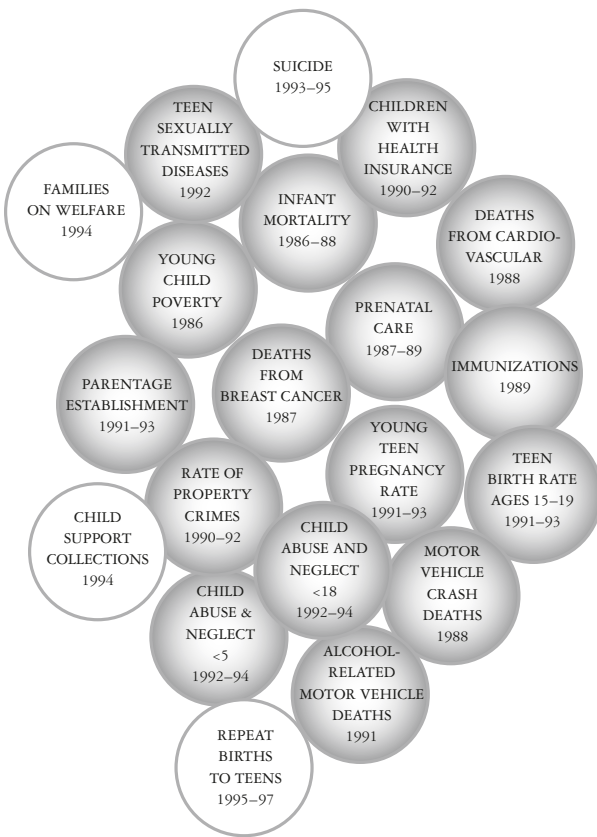
One might argue that this second set of indicators involves more complex social factors, such as those related to changes in both personal behavior and cultural norms. As these indicators accumulate, however, their synergy takes effect. We do not fully understand the nature or the extent of these interconnections, but they are definitely at work. At this stage, a visual representation that tracks the improving indicators brings this interactivity to life as well as the concepts of critical mass, tipping point, and synergy.



*The Current Set of Improving Indicators*

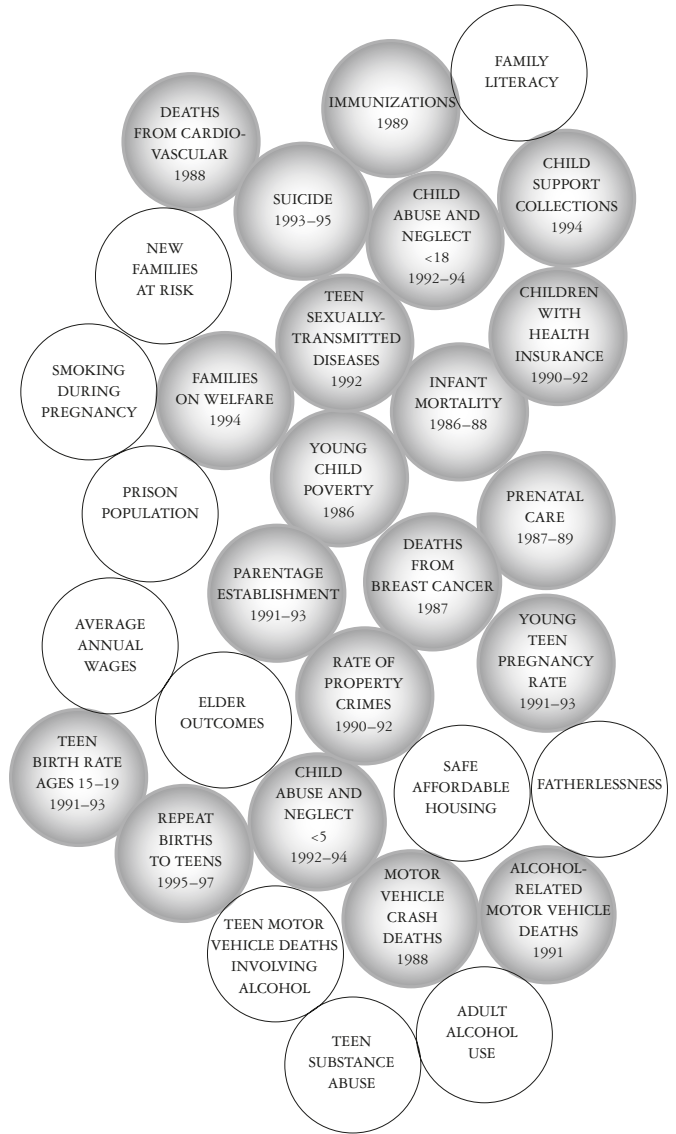
By the mid- to late 1990s, more Vermont indicators had begun to improve:

- Child support collections
- Repeat births to teens
- Families on welfare
- Average annual wage
- Median household income
- Unemployment
- Suicide.



*The Next Challenges for Well-Being*

The next graphic shows the accumulation of improving indicators in Vermont to date. Assessing what indicators are missing or not improving (shown here in gray) helps us focus on the next generation of efforts.



**Lessons Learned About Indicator Critical Mass**

Probably the most important lesson here is that starting anywhere, in one way or another, leads to everywhere. Therefore, if we focus activity on an indicator or two in a particular region, over time its connections will take us in many different but related directions.

Further, well-articulated outcomes and indicators are larger than any organizational effort. Therefore, when multiple organizations, institutions, communities, and citizens contribute to improved well-being, the synergy is enormous. Such is the power of outcomes.



Others lessons also apply:

- No single pathway exists for an indicator
- Multiple, even unlimited, connections abound
- Pathways cross organizational and institutional boundaries
- One thing leads to another—for better or worse
- If one indicator is improving, so are others
- If one indicator is worsening, so are others.

These characteristics of interactivity are a blessing, because none of us have the resources or the capacity to focus on everything at once. So the best lesson is to take one indicator and work on it; over time, your efforts will take you everywhere.

## Chapter 14:

### COMMUNICATING COMMON PURPOSE

An outcomes-and-indicators framework provides a format for consolidating complex information that can then be communicated in accessible ways. Indeed, engaging a broader audience around common purpose is at the center of our work. So, communicating progress toward outcomes of well-being furthers this common purpose. Plus, we gain the support of a broader audience, in part, by effectively communicating our progress. It's a kind of feedback loop.

**Engaging a Broader Audience** Following is a description of strategies, some traditional and some non-traditional, for communicating outcomes work to key constituencies. Using these communications tools effectively attracts more partners to the work of improving community well-being.

#### *Legislators*

Understanding the legislative process is essential for any program administrator trying to convince often skeptical elected representatives of the need for further funding. It's a grueling process. All parties to the debate claim to be experts about what does and doesn't work. But what one hears is mostly opinion. Thus, legislators are constantly searching for evaluation data and other substantive information that could demonstrate whether a program does, in fact, work.

Usually, evaluation data are scarce, if available at all. The most useful program evaluations require years of longitudinal study; the worst of them are simply anecdotal. Because of cost and complexity, the former are rarely undertaken, and the latter are worth little.

From our perspective, getting legislators to focus on outcomes and their indicators would give them the data they need. Yet, legislatures are not typically organized around results or outcomes, especially data that cut

across programs and departments. Only occasionally do cross-cutting committees combine the shared interests of several standing committees. Thus, during his tenure as Secretary of Vermont's Agency of Human Services, Con would always provide an outcomes orientation during the obligatory budget hearings held by the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Before he would give his formal presentation, Con would ask for 10 minutes to give each senator a brief breakdown of indicators for the people in his or her district. Having that kind of data is valuable, because using the data in this way gets results. For example, Con would show the committee chair that his district had fewer teen pregnancies over the past five years. Further, he would explain that multiple factors contributed to this result, including some of the departments whose budgets the committee was about to review. Now he had the senator's attention.

At the same time, Con would present each senator with some disappointing information from his or her district, which would challenge them to make changes for the future. For example,

*Unfortunately, Senator, even though your district had some good news in fewer teen pregnancies, the number of young people who died through drinking-and-driving on your highways is simply not acceptable.*

This kind of straight talk, accompanied by the relevant trend data, set a new tone for accountability in the committee meeting ahead. Department after department would now be challenged with the fundamental outcomes question, "*What can you or your organization do to help reduce the number of young people dying on our highways?*"

Using cross-program outcomes as the foundation for a budget presentation changes the nature of the legislative discussion. At the most informal level, e-mail postings on outcomes-and-indicators news can start the grapevine moving. We discovered the value of a weekly e-mail regarding outcomes sent to the governor's office (see Chapter 15). One could just as well send the same to each legislator or to selected committee chairs. In

this "wired" world, sharing such communication is easy and quick and, therefore, could realize similar dividends with employees and contractors.

### *Employees*

Getting deserved appreciation for the detailed work on specific outcomes requires focused ways of communicating. At Vermont's Agency of Human Services, we tried to keep the outcomes continually in front of our employees.

In our main training room, we created a "wraparound" display of photographs and indicator charts. During the course of a year, most of the agency's 2,600 employees statewide would come through this space. The combination of trend-line data, which showed progress (or lack of it) on specific indicators of well-being, along with compelling human photographs, conveyed a message of caring that was apparent to everyone. The display represented our values and our progress toward those values for the people we serve. Employees frequently mentioned the training room as being an important place. They couldn't spend any significant time there without having a fuller sense of what their work was about in very human terms.

Successful businesses have realized the importance of a positive employee culture. As a result, they devote considerable time and resources to develop the "right stuff" with their employees. Much of the quality control programs in business are aimed at creating the right atmosphere with employees.

- At Federal Express, the company adopted a "people are first" emphasis, originally referring to its customers. However, when they realized it should refer as well to their employees, productivity really took off.
- At Delta Airlines, the quality of the employee culture in the 1980s was readily recognized by its customers and, as a result, contributed significant economic value to the company.

Clearly, a positive employee culture is a significant asset—an intangible asset.

Another way of communicating common purpose with employees is to use the outcomes perspective to enhance employee performance reviews, which are standard in government. For example, at our agency, we began to ask all personnel the same question in their annual evaluations: “*What did you or your organization do to contribute to progress on the outcomes?*” (see Chapter 15).

### *Neighborhoods*

Another strategy that helps to embed outcomes thinking within a community is to have political leaders write personalized congratulations to community members in areas that have shown great progress.

For example, if a neighborhood has had no child deaths over a five-year period, that’s something to celebrate. That kind of information is not usually tracked at the local level; consequently, the community is unlikely to be aware of it. One task of effective communications is to point out such achievements. A brief, unsolicited letter from state officials to a local coalition or leader gets the attention of thoughtful people in the community.

Little achievements like these are all around. We just don’t notice them. They need regularly to be brought before the people most directly concerned. Those who have contributed to the success of a local initiative should have their efforts acknowledged—for their own sake and for the community’s. Given the speed of our lives, we all need to slow down enough to notice and thank others.

### *The Press*

Effective communications are often distinguished not by their quantity but by their quality. A good example is the occasional meeting of key administrators with newspaper editorial boards. Such boards meet regularly, and the opportunity to join them is important. Unfortunately, some high-impact problem or crisis event is usually behind their invitation to attend.

For example, if a child in foster care dies, the editorial board will likely want to meet with the commissioner of whichever agency is responsible for child protection.

The discussion will be overshadowed, properly so, by the death of the child. As a result, the questions can be probing and uncomfortable. Any administrator who agrees to attend such a meeting also knows that his or her remarks are on the record.

Why couldn’t agency or program administrators meet with editorial boards without the occasion being a crisis? Low-stakes discussions could be opportunities to develop a broader vision, to establish outcomes of common purpose, and to explain the work of a complex agency. Such opportunities could also relate how people, energy, and resources from different perspectives can contribute to well-being.

These kinds of background discussions would probably not result in any specific press about outcomes, but they might encourage a new tone for those who write the stories. Although an event such as a child’s death requires prominent and critical news coverage, having had previous background on the community’s overall progress toward relevant outcomes might give editors the right context for their coverage.

**Media Opportunities** The press is called the “fourth estate” because of its importance in society. Print and broadcast media are essential elements for communicating clearly with the general public about outcomes and indicators. Cultivating good relationships with reporters is crucial. For example, taking a reporter on what Con calls an “outcomes ride” can be more productive than any press conference.

During his tenure as secretary, Con would arrange for a reporter who regularly covers the human services beat to accompany him for a half-day to some part of the state. During these trips, they would stop at schools, daycare centers, inmate worksites, sometimes a regional prison, and any other venue in which the reporter might have interest. An investigative journalist welcomes such road trips, because of the opportunity they present to ask probing questions (in the confines of a car) on unlimited subjects; likewise, an agency or program administrator has an opportunity to preach the outcomes-and-

indicators gospel. The administrator pays a price for being on the hot seat, but the benefits are mutual.

Over the course of several long rides like this, a reporter begins to appreciate the context for human services programs as well as for outcomes-and-indicators work. This orientation in sensitivity and details raises to a higher level press treatment of the issues. When every challenge by a reporter is met with a description by the administrator of some contribution to an indicator of well-being, the reporter's pen remembers.

#### *Press Conferences That Work*

Press conferences become predictable fare. Reporters quickly learn the range of topics that are typical and begin to focus on details. As a result, press conferences tend over time to become more focused and more combative.

credibility. For example, over several years, Vermont's Governor devoted 10 minutes at several press conferences to the issue of teen pregnancies, which during this cycle were declining substantially. A governor loves to bring this kind of good news to the people. Declining teen pregnancies was an indicator that connected with people emotionally and received universal acclaim—if the rates go down, that's a good thing.

Occasionally, however, the news is not so positive. As we recounted in Chapter 3, in three of the previous eight years, Vermont had the worst ranking among states in the percentage of teen deaths in car accidents that involved alcohol. We clearly recall the press conference where we brought that message to the public. The governor offered a strong challenge to Vermonters as a result. For months, that piece of indicator data rattled around political circles, the media, legislative hearings,

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**Whether we're talking about surveys, press conferences, editorial board meetings, acknowledgment letters, trend-line charts, indicator briefings, or outcomes rides, the media and their representatives are outreach tools that no human services effort can afford to neglect.**

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One of the ways to leaven the intensity, while simultaneously promoting outcomes and indicators, is occasionally to include short (10-minute) presentations about a particular indicator and its trend, either positive or negative. If presented well, the information provides an opportunity for the official holding the press conference to comment on the collective effort of agency work, rather than on the details of particular programs. In the context of the typical give-and-take with reporters, he or she is likely to welcome such an approach.

For the benefit of television coverage, a press conference needs a simple visual backdrop that tells a story. Usually, a single chart, showing a trend line going either up or down, is effective. Even though chief executives and their staffs much prefer to present good news, some challenging news is also important for balance and

and community meetings such as Rotary Clubs. Conveying the indicator in dramatic terms helped galvanize the responses to these teen deaths from a number of important community members.

#### *Broad Annual Assessments*

A broad-based, comprehensive assessment of progress (or challenges) is as important in raising public awareness as is highlighting a particular indicator. Any gathering of a sizable number of people who have a broad, general interest in outcomes-and-indicators work provides such an opportunity.

In Vermont, the annual Governor's Prevention Conference gathers teachers, child care workers, corrections staff, and anyone else interested in the human services agenda. For many years, this conference was the largest single gathering in our state of people interested

in prevention work. Consequently, it received good media coverage. The outcomes-and-indicators approach found a receptive audience here because of its compatibility with prevention thinking.

Usually, the human services secretary or deputy secretary would present a set of overheads, which reminded people of the outcomes, and then would systematically review the progress on each indicator, whether good or bad. Each year, the annual outcomes report by the secretary was eagerly anticipated as a keynote of the meeting.

### *The Power of Surveys*

Conducting an occasional survey of personnel is an effective, although nontraditional, communications tool. Nevertheless, the survey can determine employees' awareness of the outcomes approach and its application. The results can be revealing.

In addition to showing human services managers where more investment is needed for outcomes efforts, a survey also elicits information about the outcomes themselves. As in the Heisenberg principle, where the measuring instrument or the observer actually affects the result, survey respondents are affected by what they perceive as the survey's message. For some employees, such a survey is their first introduction to the outcomes approach and its relationship to their work. We have more to say about such surveys in Chapter 15.

Whether we're talking about surveys, press conferences, editorial board meetings, acknowledgment letters, trend-line charts, indicator briefings, or outcomes rides, the media and their representatives are outreach tools that no human services effort can afford to neglect.

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## The Impact of Outcomes Work

The dynamics of change suggest the potential impact of outcomes work. We have found that the more *complicated* the organization, the more *dangerous* the situation, the more *complex* the information, the more *intense* the politics, then the more *compelling* is the common purpose that fuels this work. To the extent that our common-purpose outcomes touch on matters of life and death, the critical mass that emerges in response is truly significant. As outcomes point the way and indicators navigate the route, we can identify several kinds of impacts.

### **Achieving Results Satisfies a Human Need**

The human need to achieve, to contribute, to make a difference runs deep in our psyche and collective history. Outcomes, by their nature, are concerned with a higher level of achievement than what is represented in the day-to-day performance of programs. Achievement in the context of a particular program is satisfying, but its impact is limited. In contrast, progress on a fundamental outcome of well-being represents a significant contribution to people's lives.

Can any of us say, "*Through my work or my choices within family or neighborhood, I helped reduce the rate of teen pregnancies in my community*"? Being able to say that answers a fundamental human motive—namely, the need to see personal contribution make a difference.

**Good Results Motivate More Goals** Tracking outcomes can become sweetly addictive. Outcomes and their indicators push us to communicate outside our normal channels and relationships. Tracking an outcome across programs or even across agencies and seeing a trend begin to change for the better carries a special thrill. The communication that follows is positive and, at times, exhilarating. New partners begin to

enjoy the results and share the credit among the many others who contributed.

The clarity of the outcomes-and-indicators language, which is so important for engaging a range of partners, instills a confidence that we can do even more. The whole is truly greater than its parts.

### **Positive Outcomes Mean Taking Credit Together**

Sharing responsibility for improvement implies that we can also share credit when the outcomes improve. Taking credit sustains the positive teamwork that is essential for continued community building. Taking credit together is a celebration. Sharing credit feeds community pride and builds positive connections to a sense of place that is too often missing these days. Positive outcomes carry the group along through inevitable setbacks as well as further successes.

The people of Barre can take pride and credit for contributing to substantial reductions in teen pregnancies and child abuse over the past four years. Many people and organizations had something to do with those results. Positive outcomes don't happen by themselves.

### **Improved Well-Being Is What This Work Is About**

Adopting an outcomes framework reminds us what our work is about: namely, improving conditions of well-being. An involved community knows that government cannot (and should not) try to provide solutions to all society's problems. In fact, a proliferation of programs over the past few decades creates expectations that programs, by themselves, will make the difference.

Using a framework of common purpose introduces an overdue perspective: that all of us can contribute to achieving outcomes of well-being. Government is only one contributor. Government may now have to shift gears in response but, once the shift is made, citizens and neighbors regain important recognition. By finding common purpose across many issues, we can all contribute to well-being.



### **Money Is Not the Most Important Variable**

Funds are important, no question. However, focused human energy is an equally important resource. The two reinforce each other. Increased resources applied to more integrated work reinforce more focused energy on results. More integrated results set the stage for more focused energy through more effective citizen strategies. Outcomes work is very connected; no single variable carries the load.

When community efforts are integrated within a framework of common purpose, money is put in its place—a more relative and realistic place—within an array of other resources. Barre is an example where common purpose was articulated across many sectors of the community. Together, the people and organizations of Barre are finding ways in which everyone, over time, can contribute to improved well-being.

**Creating Something Out of Nothing** As an effective outcomes movement is based more on focused human energy than on large-dollar investments, we could view this as “*creating something out of nothing*.” In some ways, this view is analogous to intangible value on a business balance sheet. If one is successful in creating focused energy on behalf of particular outcomes, community well-being is near at hand.

## Chapter 15:

### CHANGING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Resistance to change is unfortunately a hallmark of organizational culture. Of course, government agencies are not exceptions. New managers and elected officials come into public service with grand ideas about what they want to achieve. They imagine the role their agencies will play as agents of change. More often than not, however, they leave office with their achievements falling far short of their well-intentioned expectations.

In the rounds of welfare reform across the nation, considerable attention was paid to the culture of welfare agencies and the role that their employees could play in achieving agency goals. An independent study of Vermont’s welfare reform determined that the likelihood of success markedly improved when clients and caseworkers both believed that the aim of the welfare program was not public assistance, per se, but getting people into jobs and out of a cycle of dependency.

To the credit of many states, serious efforts to change the long-standing culture of their welfare agencies had substantial success. Caseworkers shared their agencies’ expectation that recipients could become economically self-sufficient. The caseworkers articulated what it would take to achieve this.

The challenge now is to use a similar strategy on behalf of a more comprehensive goal that speaks to other fundamental issues of well-being within an outcomes framework.

#### **Measuring Change in Government Agencies**

A considerable number of studies have shown that among the most important variables affecting the speed of change is an organization’s culture. The business sector has provided ample demonstration of this through customer satisfaction surveys and employee focus groups. Government agencies have not generally

used these techniques—in part, because of government’s formidable inertia.

Doug Nelson, CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, was a member of the court-appointed commission studying change in New York City’s Child Welfare Department. Through this work he concluded that changing the organizational culture was still the biggest challenge, even though significant barriers to change were removed. Until the culture itself begins to change, progress will be limited.

Nevertheless, Vermont’s experience with changing the organizational culture of its government agencies suggests that positive change is possible.

#### *Using Legislation as a Foundation for Change*

In pursuing an outcomes-and-indicators framework for human services, acknowledgment of the outcomes approach within legislation provides an important foundation. Only a basic foundation is helpful, however; anything more structured can actually constrain change. Some legislatures have tried to maintain oversight at a regional level, including much of the detail of outcomes work. Such attempts to control the change process are usually unproductive. Because outcomes work intentionally crosses traditional lines, defensiveness over “turf” is easily aroused. Yet, exactly because this work breaks new ground, we must protect its innovative potential. Therefore, structure needs to be kept at a minimum in any legislation regarding outcomes and indicators.

In Vermont, the ideal solution was reached by having only the outcomes and the primary state partners written into law. That language was made part of the appropriations budget, which already cuts across legislative and executive functions. The 1999–2000 Vermont Legislative Session passed Bill H554 in both the House and Senate. Section 100 on “Improving Outcomes Through State and Community Partnerships” was short and to the point:

*(a) The General Assembly supports and encourages the collaborative, reciprocal ventures undertaken by the Agency of Human Services, the Department of Education, the University of Vermont, and their community partners in order to improve the lifelong well-being of all Vermonters. It creates a research partnership among the parties to study and improve the effectiveness of this collaborative work and gives permission for this research to be cooperatively funded by the partners.*

*(b) Outcomes related to the well-being of Vermonters shall be studied and reported for at least the following areas:*

- *Pregnant Women and Newborns Thrive, Infants and Children Thrive*
- *Children Are Ready for School*
- *Children Are Successful in School*
- *Children Live in Stable and Supported Families*
- *Youth Choose Healthy Behaviors*
- *Youth Successfully Transition to Adulthood*
- *Families, Youth, Citizens Are Engaged in and Contribute to Community Decisions and Activities*
- *Families and Individuals Live in Safe and Supportive Communities*
- *Elders and People With Disabilities Live With Dignity and Independence in Settings They Prefer.*

*(c) On or before February 15 of each year, the Secretary of the Agency of Human Services and the Commissioner of Education shall file a written report with the General Assembly regarding the development and accomplishments of state and regional partnerships, the status of outcomes on a state and local level, and the findings of research undertaken. The Secretary and Commissioner shall also make recommendations for improving existing state, regional, and local partnerships based on the outcome research data.*

The Vermont outcomes in Section (b) were adopted in the early 1990s. Over the intervening years, these outcomes were publicized continually by the Agency of Human Services in numerous communications, in

employee evaluations, and in publicity for public events. The outcomes and their indicators provided a cross-department agenda for all agency employees and their community partners.

### *Gauging Impact Through Employee Surveys*

In 1998, as part of a training-needs survey, the agency attempted to determine the extent to which its culture had shifted in support of the outcomes, which by then had been in place for several years. The economic investments in activities to achieve these outcomes could not, by themselves, account for the progress reflected by the indicator data. We wondered whether part of the explanation might be that the outcomes framework itself inspired a change among employees. We were also curious to see the degree to which agency staff saw their work as contributing to one or more of the outcomes. In this regard, our hopes were modest.

A total of 2,600 surveys were distributed to employees in all departments, including Social Welfare, Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, Public Health, Aging and Disabilities, Corrections, Child Welfare, Child Support, and Medicaid. Responses were received from 420 employees, a response rate of 18 percent. We had hoped for responses from at least 20 percent. Although the survey was not professionally designed, we don't know why the response rate wasn't higher. Still, the rate was adequate for gaining some initial understandings.

The respondents were well distributed across department hierarchies, including a solid representation of front-line staff from all departments. Respondents included people from many different regions of the state and from 17 different communities and represented 131 different job titles. The depth and breadth were encouraging.

The remarkable results related to the question, "*Does your work contribute to these outcomes?*"

Of the 420 respondents, 95 percent agreed. This was a good deal more than we had expected. If half of the responses had been affirmative, we would have been

gratified. Even if the 95 percent represented all of the positive responses we'd get from the 2,600 employees surveyed, this would have been a nearly 20 percent positive response rate. A 20 percent shift in organizational behavior is something that anyone in public service would recognize as cause for celebration. We believe that, if more responses had been received, some proportion of those would likely have been positive as well. In sum, the 95 percent positive rate from all respondents was impressive.

### *Identifying Patterns in Individual Responses*

Within the individual responses to the question, we identified several common themes. Here are some of those responses.

**Outcomes Give Focus to People's Work**—The most prevalent theme, deserving quoting responses at some length, had to do with how the outcomes provided a new focus or framework for an individual's work.

*Every day in my work as a [child welfare] adoption social worker, I focus on and work with families toward these outcomes.*

*By contributing to public health, I contribute to AHS outcomes.*

*I am a Reach Up [welfare-to-work] social worker, so the work I do enables families to become self-sufficient and more stable.*

*[This outcome] describes in one line what my job as guardianship services specialist is all about.*

*I am part of the public health team that takes seriously the combined efforts needed to achieve these outcomes.*

*All [of my work contributes to the outcomes] by trying to remember that all people have dreams and hope to be independent.*

*[I am] very much engaged with families with young children, getting them booked into community resources, health education, direct health services, supportive of healthy behavior choices.*

At [the Division of Developmental Services], we grant Social Security and Medicaid benefits to eligible people with disabilities. We also refer people to [Vocational Rehabilitation] and children to the Health Department. These activities contribute to all outcomes to some degree.

My work with [the child welfare department] helps to keep children safe from abuse or neglect. It also helps families to change so they can provide nurturing, safe homes. We also work to ensure timely permanency for each child and to help teens work toward a healthy, productive adulthood.

In my work through the Office of Child Support as a paralegal, I directly involve the family members in the decision-making process. When the child(ren) are mature, I hope their involvement results in preventive behavior that allows them to live their lives via preferred decision-making habits. This results in allowing the child(ren) to thrive as well as allowing the parents to thrive. Parents often thrive after this office establishes a policy with them that states they must have a [goal] of stable employment, which we can assist them with through the Department of Employment and Training, if necessary.

We work with individuals with disabilities to help them become financially independent and have dignity and self-confidence. This impacts their whole family and school outcomes of their children.

My work in helping provide the basic necessities (food, shelter, a source of income, and medical care) facilitates the achievement of these outcomes.

By assisting people with disabilities to become fully employed, I help create a wide variety of positive individual and family outcomes that result from financial independence and community participation.

I focus on getting people who are employed the services they need to stay employed, which in turn supports their families.

Because of the programs we offer through my work with children and families in my role as a social worker for the state, I feel that I support and make a positive impact in these outcomes.

As part of [Vocational Rehabilitation], we can assist individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment. This employment serves to allow consumers to live in dignity in the community of their choice and more fully participate in those communities.

Through work on developing and implementing quality programs, which directly address the needs and enhance the strengths of people, [I] help them to achieve these states of well-being.

We are building a new managed care information system for DDMHS, which will provide more timely information on our behavioral health and developmental service system of care in Vermont. Much of the new information will focus on housing, employment, and other performance indicators to judge how well our system is doing.

By supplying access to data for and about the outcomes.

My work involves preparing reports and other public information materials, which all have an impact on promoting the outcomes.

I take part in program planning, and we use the desired outcomes as a basis for decision making.

[My work doesn't contribute] directly, but my office works very hard on all of these outcomes.

**Outcomes Help People Connect With Others' Work**—A second theme that was evident in some of the respondents' remarks was that the outcomes helped employees make connections, either conceptually or concretely, between their work and the work of others:

*I affect all of them. If people are successful at one, then they will succeed in the others.*

*Provides connections with other community partners.*

*As part of Corrections, I only deal with adults. However, I hope that as the adults' behavior improves, so will the children's. Truthfully, though, we are unable to give as much attention to each client as I would like and as would be most beneficial. We either need more employees or fewer clients to do a better job. At the moment, we are spread far too thin.*

[My work is] focused on substance abuse prevention, which impacts many of the outcomes.

As system developers, we create and maintain software that allows other divisions to collect data that is used in determining outcomes.

**Outcomes Link With Personal Values**—A third theme expressed how employees recognized that the outcomes were linked with their personal values, which provided further motivation for their work:

services departments. Receiving the report on Friday allowed the governor time over the weekend to review the previous week's progress. It was not intended to provide in-depth analysis but to capture the tone of what happened in and about the agency that week.

Con began sending the report by e-mail to every agency employee who had computer access, which ultimately meant it reached everyone. At the same time, the Friday report was forwarded to all contractors and other

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**Through trainings, memos, discussion, and evaluations, the relationships between supervisors and employees were beginning to take the outcomes into account. This result gave us hope that the culture of a large and complex agency may indeed have begun to change.**

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*Family Centered Practice supports healthy family environments. My social perspective also supports this philosophy.*

*I volunteer for local projects and have other paid employment for the support of these outcomes.*

*As my family becomes part of the elderly population, I can see how our work makes their lives livable and happy.*

**The Outcomes Message Is Spread by Technology**—The survey also asked employees where they had first learned about the outcomes. Once again, some responses were surprising:

- 53 percent of the respondents indicated that they had learned about the outcomes through the “Friday FYI” report to the governor;
- 30 percent indicated that they had learned about the outcomes from the agency personnel department’s web site as well as from the general use of interdepartmental e-mail.

These data resulted in a couple of significant “aha’s.”

**The Importance of Sharing News** In 1991, early in Con’s term as agency secretary, he was asked by the governor to submit a Friday report. In essence, this report, e-mailed to the governor, was a compilation of events and activities from each of the 12 human

partners of the agency. The only difference between the version that the governor received and the version sent to everyone else was that we would delete from the latter one or two items that were clearly confidential in nature.

The first paragraph of every report usually had to do with current news about an outcome and its indicator data from some place in Vermont. For example, a typical entry might look like the following:

*Governor, I am really pleased to report to you that for the last calendar year, the rate of childhood immunizations for the coalition area of St. Johnsbury was 100%. This is a real accomplishment by all of the departments and community partners that have worked so hard on this over the last couple of years. There are very few places in the nation that can claim a 100% rate. I know they would enjoy a “thank you” note from you.*

Or,

*Governor, Vermont’s infant mortality rate is simply not what it needs to be. Ten years ago, Vermont’s rate was about half that of the nation. But Vermont’s rate has remained nearly steady at 7 deaths per thousand births, while the rate for the nation has been on a slow but steady decline. We’re at the point now where the nation’s rate has*

*caught up with Vermont's. And because of our demographics, because of the outstanding progress we've seen on other indicators we have tracked over the years, and because we sit right between two excellent medical centers at Dartmouth and the University of Vermont, there is no excuse for this. We will need your help in mobilizing communities in three parts of the state where these mortality rates are particularly egregious.*

What we didn't realize was how widely these reports were read. The reason was straightforward: People realized they were reading the same summary that the governor was receiving. They liked that. As a result, they read it regularly. We knew this anecdotally, but we never had a sense of how systematic it actually was. The survey told us that 53 percent of respondents reported receiving information about outcomes from the Friday report. This response rate was an important affirmation of what we had already begun to believe about the power of e-mail.

The next piece of data was equally interesting: 45 percent of the respondents indicated that they had learned about the outcomes through their "department heads or supervisors." (Respondents could indicate more than one method of communication.) This response was equally satisfying. It meant that the outcomes were becoming embedded in the bureaucracy.

Through trainings, memos, discussion, and evaluations, the relationships between supervisors and employees were beginning to take the outcomes into account. This result gave us hope that the culture of a large and complex agency may indeed have begun to change.

We also wanted to know whether the respondents had just learned about the outcomes as a result of the survey itself: 75 percent indicated that they were aware of the outcomes prior to the survey.

#### *Employee Feedback*

Some of the most important information gained was from the unstructured part of the survey. Employees were encouraged to share their thoughts throughout the survey. About 100 noncategorized responses were

received. Of these, half were clearly in support of the outcomes approach. Many cited the power of outcomes as a communications tool and, in particular, their positive message.

*They are good. The simplistic approach is understandable, clear, and easy to explain.*

*They are great, clear, and simple; all AHS departments can contribute to their success.*

*Clear, easy to understand, and relatable. Inspire action.*

*Originally thought they were far too general but now approve. They are in language that many partners can understand.*

*It's nice to see that the work that we are involved in eventually has a success story.*

Other comments had to do with the motivational power of the outcomes:

*They are overwhelming, but they are very worthwhile trying to attain.*

*I think they're great. They make me feel proud to be part of AHS.*

*I like them. I would like to continue to find ways to engage the general public in achieving them.*

*In a perfect world, they could all be obtained. Meanwhile, we must strive to attain them.*

*I believe they provide guidance for our work and a way to increase job satisfaction by clearly indicating our successes. I also believe we could do better work over time due to ongoing evaluation.*

*Won't it be great when they come true!*

Finally, some comments referred once again to the value of the outcomes in providing a framework for the efforts of people working in many different capacities:

*I believe all of our operations and measures should be geared toward these outcomes.*

*These outcomes are vital underpinnings of a healthy, productive, successful society.*



*It's a great guide for communities and state government.*

*Very worthwhile—help us see our files as people.*

*They should be basic goals for all.*

*Excellent, comprehensive, broad enough to encompass many aspects of our work with people.*

*I feel they are very broad—allowing for interpretation and representation by individual departments, but they give a strong and positive focus.*

### *Summing Up*

These survey comments were interesting from several points of view.

First, the language was rich. These comments were from people who care about their work and generally see the outcomes as a way to contribute to the common purpose of improving the well-being of Vermonters.

Second, this survey was the first opportunity that agency employees had to express themselves in a systematic way about the outcomes and their relationship to the day-to-day work.

On the other hand, half of the respondents did not feel that the outcomes were connected with their work. Most of these responses were from the Department of Corrections, which has a long history of feeling misplaced within the Agency of Human Services rather than with Public Safety. These responses reflect that:

*I'm a jailer—the above does not apply or is in conflict with my job duties. I do not work directly with the clients like a social worker would. I feel I try to contribute my skills to help in any way that I can.*

*[My office] provides health care coverage—outcomes are not directly connected.*

*The outcomes do not speak to adults with drug and alcohol problems or adult criminal offenders.*

*[These] outcomes are mainly for children; I work with adults.*

*My work contributes in only the most infinitesimal way. I am too low on the totem pole to make a contribution with any significance.*

*I'm a secretary—I shuffle paper.*

### **Participation and Responsibility Are Critical**

The outcomes-and-indicators movement is best served when all who contribute to better outcomes are involved and acknowledged. Simple acknowledgment, which surveys provide at least indirectly, reinforces the concept of individual responsibility toward common purpose. When an outcome or indicator is, by design, broader than the scope and accountability of any particular program or agency, various means of measuring organizational change become part of how a community (including the community of an organization) takes stock of its well-being. And a sense of personal responsibility is potentially the most powerful contribution that people can make to improve overall well-being.

These approaches to organizational change also create fertile ground for progress on an important part of outcomes work: namely, government–community trust. That trust develops when community members and government agencies agree on the priorities for improving well-being. The outcomes-and-indicators framework can bring communities and government closer together. Such is the power of outcomes.

People work best in an environment where they are striving for shared goals. Moreover, people develop an emotional connection with these goals. And an emotional connection is essential for motivating organizational change.

# Chapter 16:

## THE PROFITABILITY OF PREVENTION

A dollars-and-cents approach to investment in human services argues more persuasively than any poster child that this work is worth doing. This persuasion is especially effective when communicating with business people, lawmakers, or taxpayers. Once an outcomes-and-indicators framework has been in place a few years, we can develop estimates of costs and savings associated with specific indicator trends. Such cost–benefit analysis makes a compelling case for prevention or intervention activities by quantifying the impacts that accompany improving, or declining, well-being.

For example, the dollars spent by Vermont’s Agency of Human Services in one year represent more than half the expenditures made by all of our state’s government. Admittedly, these expenditures include some very big-ticket items, such as health care, corrections, and welfare. In terms of the mega-arithmetic of the agency, its spending represents about \$1,000 for every man, woman, and child in Vermont over the course of a year.

Contrast this with specific spending to improve well-being in Barre, a town of about 10,000 people. For \$20,000, Barre was able to support a sustained focus on three particularly worrisome indicators—child abuse, teen pregnancies, and school dropouts—by harnessing the value of relationships. That’s \$2 for every man, woman, and child in Barre. If recent trends continue, the town of Barre will realize a benefit, in terms of tangible “avoided” costs, many times the amount originally spent.

**Quantifying Social Costs and Offsets** The field of “social costs” estimation is still relatively new. No definitive calculus exists for a comprehensive inventory of assets and liabilities in human services. However, several studies provide data. Charles Bruner of the Child and Family Policy Center has published a bibliography that explores the range of “return on investment”

considerations in key programmatic and policy initiatives.<sup>1</sup> Another monograph, *State Investments in Family Economic Security—A Portfolio Management Approach to State Welfare Investments*, draws the parallel between portfolio management on behalf of individuals in the private sector and state welfare programs as “investment portfolios” in the public sector.<sup>2</sup>

Such analyses nearly always rest on incomplete information, numerous assumptions, and many intangible values. In short, this science is inexact. Nevertheless, a dollars-and-cents approach builds support for the broader work of human services, especially when supported by an outcomes-and-indicators framework.

### *Vermont Dividends*

Several years ago, we used this approach to examine a number of improving indicators in Vermont—child abuse and neglect, teen pregnancy, child support collections, and families successfully leaving welfare.<sup>3</sup> We were able to show that, over a period of eight years, progress in well-being had resulted in “dividends” that totaled \$247 million in 1998 dollars.

In a state the size of Vermont, that’s a considerable sum of money.

Yet these estimates were conservative: They included only “present-day” value, not any savings that might accrue in future years, and they included only direct, public, tangible costs—none of the privately borne costs, which are not only monetary but include intangible losses as well. For the most part, we used previously published estimates of the “cost-offsets” associated with avoided demand for services. Where these estimates were not specific to our state, we used national estimates.

We learned, for example, that for every young teen pregnancy avoided, we could assign an annual cost-offset of \$20,500. For every avoided child abuse victim, we could likewise assign an annual “savings” of more than \$33,000. Because we had an indicator system in place, we could readily determine that there were more than 400 fewer young teen pregnancies and over 2,500 fewer abused children than would have been the case if earlier trends had continued unchanged.

In assessing Vermont's dividends, we were also able to quantify, in dollar terms, some of the benefits stemming from the state's policy shift from supporting family economic dependency to supporting family self-sufficiency. We tracked the decline (nearly \$56 million) in state spending on welfare benefits, as more people left assistance and started work, usually with substantial training and support beforehand. (During this period, no Vermont welfare recipients were "kicked off" the rolls.)

At the same time, we tracked the increase (some \$97 million) in child support collections over the same period. Some of these dollars went to defray the costs of welfare, if those single parents were receiving public assistance; another portion of these collections, however, went directly to help families get off welfare or avoid falling into dependency in the first place.

We applied a similar logic to some current initiatives in corrections and long-term health care. We showed how innovative, community-based alternatives to incarceration and to nursing home care had resulted in tangible cost reductions. In both cases, fiscal trends and changing demographics required new solutions.

**Prevention as Investment** The ability to use data to demonstrate the social and financial value of alternatives was critical to winning support from lawmakers and practitioners who were skeptical of change.

Converting human services work into dollars and *sense* is really just translating concepts and language in the interest of better communication between the private and public sectors. This approach also "sells" the concept of prevention as "investment"—that is, avoiding problems in the first place and freeing public resources for more productive purposes, including further prevention work. Being able to make the fiscal case for well-being is smart strategy. Such is the power of outcomes *and* indicators.

## Chapter 17:

### MISTAKES AND NEAR-MISSES

In Vermont, we almost made a misstep when our legislature wanted to draft outcomes and indicators into law. They wanted to mandate who and how and which and what—the whole routine. We came very close to being a prisoner of prescriptive reforms. Finally, the legislature adopted "just the outcomes"—that's all. The lesson learned was "keep it simple." Such is the power of outcomes, unfettered by excess structure or process.

Having only the outcomes in law gave us the flexibility to achieve them. Yet, we were very close to having another layer of government constraining our creativity and initiative. Instead of mandated timetables, data reports, and committee meetings, each agency now only has to answer (each year) the fundamental outcomes question: "*What did you do to improve the well-being of Vermonters toward these outcomes?*"

The following are some other insights born of mistakes and near-misses.

**Near-Miss: Overreliance on Organizational Structure** Alignment of energy and focus on behalf of a common objective is standard practice in the private sector. Such alignment is not as evident in the public sector. As a result, and sometimes unfairly, the public does not have a very positive perception of those who work in government. Still, the stereotype of government workers as unmotivated and working at cross-purposes is sometimes more true than not.

Government often tries to respond to this criticism by creating structural change, as if changing the hierarchy of who reports to whom will cure problems that are rooted in organizational culture. This "reorganization" approach to fixing things is also pushed along by the political cycle. Changing how an organization's structure "looks" has immediately visible results. In

contrast, changing the fundamental culture of the organization can take years to bring results. Thus, “reorganizing” fits the timeframe of election cycles, enabling officeholders to point to visible achievements. Rarely does a governor not have reorganization of some sector of state government prominently on his or her agenda. In Vermont, education, transportation, human services, and law enforcement have all been reorganized over and over throughout the years—with negligible results, save a politician’s ability to take credit.

In fact, structural change aimed at affecting organizational culture may even be damaging, for example, by raising anxiety among staff. For years after a change-over, employees can remain preoccupied with where each one stands and how restructuring affects compensation, job responsibilities, and so forth. Often, these concerns eclipse the quality issues that were the aim of the reorganization in the first place.

**Near-Miss: Confusing Coordination With Co-Location** In the 1970s, a movement throughout state governments emphasized “coordination of services,” which gave birth in the 1980s to its progeny, “one-stop shopping.” One-stop shopping was the belief that physical proximity would enable more closely coordinated services. Consequently, many related services were collocated under one roof.

Coordination of services became the strategy of preference because of a blind belief in this causal model: If we coordinate the complex activities of government better, somehow people’s lives will be better—or, at the very least, government will somehow work better. This belief led to a frenzy of governmental reorganization at many levels and, at best, produced good theater for short-term politics.

Who could fault better coordination? The passage of time could. Eventually, this strategy proved to be a false idol. With all the talk, better coordination became an end in itself, to the neglect of a reasoned approach. Why do we need to coordinate better? What is the purpose? The questions were never adequately

answered. We have not taken the time to define our goals in terms that we can all understand and support.

One-stop shopping caught on in many jurisdictions. A lot of money, organizational energy, and investments in facilities resulted. What this strategy never fully took into account is that the more reorganization that occurs, the less time remains for defining outcomes and indicators of well-being—the appropriate organizational focus. Organizing our ideas is simply more valuable than organizing our facilities.

Unfortunately, one-stop shopping came on the scene just before the dawn of our digital revolution. Physical proximity makes less and less difference, now that we have the ability to access and transfer information anywhere.

In large measure, the years spent improving coordination without common purpose were wasted, and the alternative, more cost-effective, possibilities were neglected.

## **The Nine Biggest Mistakes in Using Outcomes**

### *Mistake 1—Not Articulating Clear Common Purpose Across Sectors*

Some people say, and may even believe, that they are well-versed in the outcomes approach and use it as a foundation for their work. However, if you ask them what their outcomes are, they respond with talk about their favorite program or the required training they took. They didn’t get it. Outcomes work does not enhance the primary work. It is the primary work. Like a business person constantly thinking about the balance sheet and how to improve it, an outcomes-and-indicators framework requires the same level of attention. All of the work, every day, needs to be directed toward the outcomes. Leaders should use outcomes language every day with their staff. The biggest mistake is for outcomes and indicators and their common purpose not to be the center of the work. Disciplined articulation by all stakeholders brings this work to life.

*Mistake 2—Failing to Track the Indicators*

The second biggest mistake is to proceed without a way to measure progress toward or away from the articulated outcomes. The measurement system allows constant assessment of progress, and without it outcomes and indicators are only ideas. Again, many jurisdictions across the country talk in outcome terms but, when one asks “show me some results,” they are not able to do so. Instead, they respond in terms of their progress in developing structures and processes. Thus, determining who has and who has not developed the needed measurement systems is easy.

*Mistake 3—Creating Excessive Structure and Process*

A related common mistake (we’ll say it again) is putting too much time and energy into creating an organizational structure for the outcomes. Many jurisdictions have every operational aspect reflected in law or policy, including procedures and reporting requirements, without first having agreement on the outcomes. Work can get off to an energetic start, but the structure and process soon become new turf for the old fights around money and power. If excessive focus is put on everything but the outcomes, one could be worse off for having tried to use outcomes thinking than not having tried at all.

*Mistake 5—Not Staying With the Work at Least Five Years*

We have become so used to organizational fads coming and going that our attention span for change has become dangerously short. Outcomes-and-indicators work takes at least five years before one sees clear results. Many organizations don’t have the patience or the political staying power to wait that long. Some of that time lag is caused by the delayed availability of information needed to track the indicators. Shortening that information time lag is an important strategy for overcoming the anxiety around the long time between action and results. Even by eliminating a year or so from the time lag, we should still expect a 5- to 10-year period before the results of our work are evident.

*Mistake 6—Trying to Do Too Much Too Soon*

The mistake of trying to do too much too soon is related to the problem of putting excessive structure and process in place. After a great rush to get everything ready for productive work, a steady but sure slide in energy and attention follows. This behavior is familiar in a single-program orientation. Delegating the work and scheduling the development over a three- or four-year period is an important way to avoid this problem.

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**Outcomes work cannot be done by centralized government alone. It requires strong partnerships between government and communities. In fact, outcomes work is strongest when communities play a major, even a lead role.**

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*Mistake 4—Focusing Within Instead of Across Programs*

Another common mistake is to allow the discussion and the work to slip back into a focus on programs rather than one that reaches across programs. This lapse is natural because of our conditioning toward seeing programs as solutions. It is also why the language of outcomes, as well as constant vigilance on our focus, is so important. Carefully and clearly articulated outcomes help keep our work above the level of individual programs.

*Mistake 7—Ignoring the Communities*

Outcomes work cannot be done by centralized government alone. It requires strong partnerships between government and communities. In fact, outcomes work is strongest when communities play a major, even a lead role. Many government agencies find this difficult to accept. It’s not their natural way of operating. However, not involving communities is a fatal mistake. The intangible assets that are needed to improve well-being are disproportionately available among community

members and neighbors. Outcomes work can proceed only so far without community energy.

*Mistake 8—Influencing the Process With Large Amounts of Money*

Using money as the primary change agent is also a major mistake. The social landscape is littered with the results of that approach. Up-front money brings people and early energy to the table. Once the money has been assigned to one or two agencies, however, other partners soon disappear. Money may improve particular services, but it cannot attract the energy and attention of everyday citizens in helping change things for the better.<sup>4</sup>

*Mistake 9—Not Spreading Credit for the Results*

The giving and acceptance of credit motivates both individuals and groups. Recognition for good work and contributions are the fuel for bringing people together around common purpose. Not to spread credit is to ignore the power of one of life's strongest motivators.

## Chapter 18:

### EVALUATING CHANGE

The outcomes approach obligates us to evaluate how we're doing: not just how well we're implementing programs, but how well we're achieving results. Yet evaluation often has a bad name. Lynn Usher<sup>5</sup> at the University of North Carolina tells a story where the evaluator is the one who arrives on the battlefield after the war is over and then shoots all the survivors. Unfortunately, many people working in human services programs have had this experience.

Traditional evaluation standards derive from experimental studies within the social sciences, in which participants are randomly assigned to "treatment" and "control" groups. That experimental model allows for maximum certainty as to which variable, among many, the observed results can be attributed. Variables may include the characteristics of participants, the features of a program, or some broader influence. Even though this experimental model is often impractical and, in the human services context, even inappropriate, nevertheless it is, in general, the one human services use for program evaluation. What's clear to most front-line workers is that single programs (even those most rigorously "tested") are generally insufficient to improve community well-being. Community change is dynamic (frequently modified for new circumstances), collaborative (not controlled by one organization), and generally porous (with indistinct geographic boundaries).

Achieving progress toward outcomes takes collective effort. We need multiple programs and multiple stakeholders, including community members and organizations as well as state and federal agencies. In the case of publicly funded programs, we may be required to assess the quantity and quality of their inputs, but achieving outcomes is what really matters. If we're not achieving the desired outcomes, we need to change what we're doing.



The fundamental purpose of evaluation is “continuous quality improvement.” As such, any program staff pursuing outcomes should welcome evaluation. Wanting to know whether or not we are making a difference, as we’ve said more than once, is part of human nature.

**A Community Model** As outcomes work has taken hold in communities, certain issues predictably arise: assessment (how do we learn how we’re doing?), priorities (where to begin?), strategies (what works?), evaluation (what’s a reasonable standard?), and responsibility/accountability (where do they lie?). In response to these concerns, we’ve developed an alternative evaluation methodology, which is less definitive than the experimental model but better suited for studying community change. This model is intended to measure results—the common-purpose outcomes for improved community well-being. For this, we’ve drawn on public health models but also on other evaluation frameworks.<sup>6</sup>

In an outcomes-based model, evaluation need to encompass both how well a particular program is improving outcomes for its *participants* and how well the program is contributing to a comprehensive strategy to address outcomes for the *community*. These dual concerns affect program and policy planning at multiple stages—from needs assessment, through program selection and program design, to data collection and reporting results.

In Vermont communities, we have experience with some of the essential components of this dual-track process.

#### *Community Assessment*

If indicators are a reasonably objective “mirror” of community well-being, then communities can conduct thoughtful self-assessments. Historically, communities focused on “needs” assessments, usually to meet the requirements of funders, so communities are quite skilled at portraying their defects or “unfinished business.” Among the many things wrong with that approach, the main one is that communities may miss good information for leveraging positive change. Only if a community also catalogs and measures its assets and

strengths does a reasonably complete picture emerge of its opportunities for further progress.

In some cases, individual community groups or a local collaborative may already have some of these data. If appropriate and sufficient data do not exist, they should initiate the assessments needed—of course, within the limits of their resources. Such assessments might include indicator data, household statistics, qualitative reports, asset maps, neighborhood surveys, or interviews with community members. A comprehensive strategy that draws from many sources typically yields a truer community portrait than one that adopts a more limited perspective.

#### *Setting Priorities*

Once assessment data are collected, the next task for a community is to set priorities for action. The need for rational priority setting is inherent in having diverse data from multiple sources. That task is not easy. Judgment comes into play, both objective and normative. Even with “hard” (i.e., quantitative) data, determining which indicators demand the earliest attention is not always clear.

One criterion could be to select indicators where the community’s record is “worst.” But what does “worst” mean? Worse than a state average? Worse than other communities (which may or may not be similar in terms of important demographics)? Worse in relation to previous years’ data? “Worse” can also be a judgment measured against goals, perhaps those the community sets for itself (such as “zero” child abuse) or national goals (such as those in Healthy People 2010). “Worst” could also refer to those indicators that include more of the population, for instance, even relatively high rates of low-birth-weight infants involve numbers that typically are small, in an absolute sense, whereas rates of smoking typically affect considerable numbers of people, even in communities where these rates are comparatively low. Obviously, there are no right or wrong decisions to be made here, only different yardsticks to choose from. The “best” decisions on priorities will involve broad community representation and thoughtful discussion.

### *Thinking Through a Community Theory of Change*

The next step is to develop the best thinking of community members as well as to consult existing research on how to achieve their goals. Behind what we do (often implicit and unarticulated) is usually some theory or belief that motivates and informs us. A “theory of change” describes how we understand a problem and what we think is needed to address it effectively. Our theories may be simple or sophisticated; they may reflect research and practice or simply our values and biases. In any case, these theories inevitably rest on certain assumptions and are subject to revision in the face of “disconfirming evidence.”

When we articulate our theories, we may find that community members hold different views. Consensus, although helpful, is not required; public dialogue is. A community’s theory of change should be sketched out in as much detail as possible. The theory can be expressed in lists of words or in graphic flowcharts. It should reflect the “best thinking” about causes and solutions. It should reflect research evidence, expert knowledge, or best practices—all of which draw on accumulated wisdom. Theories of change should refer to risk factors and protective factors within the community, including the influence of “external,” pervasive factors, such as the media or the economy. These theories should also identify the key partners needed for the work and include both *what* should happen and *how* it should happen.

In the course of this public dialogue, some ideas may gain wider acceptance than others; some may be more amenable to “testing” than others. Having as many people as possible participate is helpful. A vigorous give-and-take process will press people to examine their assumptions and lead them to revise or discard some of their prejudices. The final draft, however, must be one that everyone can support.

### *Selecting Strategies*

After people agree on “what it will take” to make a difference, they need to identify what programs or strategies the community already has that are

consistent with its theory of change. Perhaps some components are missing; other essential components may not exist in sufficient quantity. This assessment will lead to selection of particular strategies to “fill the gaps.” The strategies chosen should be based on evidence or well-supported theory about what’s likely to be effective in achieving outcomes. A theory of change thus provides the rationale for selecting a program (i.e., why this program, in this community, at this time) *and* explains how the program’s participant outcomes will ultimately contribute to community outcomes.

Another important consideration in selecting strategies is the target population. Certain approaches are designed to work best with certain groups, such as parents, youth, pregnant teens, or “at-risk” populations. In selecting an appropriate strategy, a community should be clear about which group is the intended audience and whether that group is already adequately served. “Best practices” often tells us that multiple groups should be targeted. Some strategies cut across programs, intentionally coordinating the efforts of several programs. “Positive youth development” is one such example; it’s not a program but a strategy.

Communities know that programs alone rarely if ever make the critical difference. Just as important are the individuals implementing the programs—with caring, compassion, and energy—as well as those working outside of formal programs. Dedicated, caring people are essential to success. Programs are vehicles—but some vehicles are better suited than others.

Most community theories of change acknowledge other factors that contribute to progress toward outcomes. Rather than a list of programs, these “low-cost, no-cost”<sup>7</sup> strategies include informal, voluntary efforts of citizens (neighbors helping neighbors) and the work of faith-based organizations, volunteer groups, or civic associations. Finally, policy changes at the local, state, or federal level can also have significant impacts on outcomes—for example, a uniform age for legal purchase of alcohol.

### *Developing the Logic*

Once a particular program, activity, or approach is selected, the next step in designing an evaluation is developing a “logic model.”<sup>8</sup> A logic model is a series of “if–then” connections that link inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes, both for programs and for participants. *If* these inputs are in place, *then* we can conduct these activities; *if* these activities are conducted, *then* we can measure these outputs; *if* these outputs are measured, *then* we can identify the following outcomes for participants.

The logic model should actually start at the “end”—by identifying participant outcomes. What results would show that the program purpose was achieved or, even more to the point, how will participants be better off? Often, the answers will refer to ultimate aims, such as “reduced infant deaths” or “healthy lifestyles” or “economic self-sufficiency,” which are essentially the same as community outcomes. However, whether participants have achieved a program’s long-term outcomes is often difficult to know with any certainty, simply because we generally don’t “track” participants beyond their stay in the program.

Working backward, now, in the logic model, the key link is the one between “outcomes” and “activities.” Will program activities produce the desired outcomes (both short term and long term)? For example, one program runs workshops and trainings; another program offers counseling and skilled medical care. Activities have quantitative characteristics (e.g., intensity, frequency, duration, reach) and qualitative aspects (e.g., accepted best-practices standards).

- **Outputs** are measures of program activities, the measurable products or “deliverables.” Typically, these kinds of data, such as units of service, home visits, classes taught, presentations made, referrals completed, and mentoring hours logged, are ones programs can readily provide. Note, though, that outputs are not the same as measures of participant well-being (i.e., whether or not people are better off); they are process indicators. However, within the logic model, *outputs* are linked to participant outcomes.
- **Inputs** are the resources that programs draw on.<sup>9</sup> These include funding, staff (paid and

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**After people agree on “what it will take” to make a difference, they need to identify what programs or strategies the community already has that are consistent with its theory of change.**

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More likely, we can measure the direct impact a program has on initial or short-term outcomes for participants. These impacts typically affect attitudes, knowledge, or behaviors at the individual, family, or community level. Most theories of change will reflect these initial outcomes as precursors (necessary, if not sufficient) to intermediate and long-term outcomes. Therefore, program evaluation (and development) needs to identify what short-term outcomes participants are expected to achieve as a direct result of program activities. Typically, these outcomes will be measurable attitudes, skills, or practices.

volunteer as well as their training and experience), and infrastructure (space, equipment, etc.). Inputs may also refer to certain constraints imposed by law or policy that set limits on activities.

### *Other Considerations*

The logic model does not directly address the “level of difficulty” presented by program participants. Clearly, reasonable short-term outcomes will be different depending on who is being served. In some cases, positive outcomes are more easily obtained with participants who have the greatest needs, simply because so much room

exists for improvement. In other cases, participants who have the greatest need are highly resistant to change. The characteristics of participants also affect the level of inputs required, the types of activities offered, and the magnitude of outputs achieved. Thus, specific information on the characteristics of those served (who may be different from those targeted) should be part of what is measured under outputs.

Other information important to this issue can be constructed only “after the fact.” Who were the most successful participants (in terms of outcomes)? Who were the least successful? What can be done to make the least successful participants more successful?

Once adequate measures (“indicators”) are developed for inputs, outputs, and outcomes, each part of the logic model lends itself to some evaluation. In addition, evaluation can test the “pathways” that link inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Using this framework, well-chosen “process” measures can provide valuable interim evaluation data, such as whether programs are “on track,” even before outcome data are available. Questions the logic model naturally raises include:

- Did the program have the inputs needed to provide high-quality activities?
- Were the activities of sufficient intensity, frequency, and duration?
- Were the activities carried out according to best-practices standards?
- Did the activities attract the desired target population?
- Did the activities result in the expected outputs?
- Did the program produce outputs on a scale that could reasonably be expected to make a difference?

And, finally,

- Does evidence exist that the activities resulted in measurable outcomes for participants in terms of attitudes, skills, or conditions?

Once this sort of evaluation is conducted, the results may motivate a community to reconsider its theory of

change. Perhaps this program *won't* help achieve community outcomes. Perhaps certain key partners were left out. Perhaps sufficient resources or time weren't invested. Or, the evaluation may confirm important aspects of its theory of change (e.g., participants *did* change their attitudes, which *has* led to behavioral changes, which *will* impact community outcomes).

To work well as an evaluation tool, the logic model needs to be continuously revisited. It should be refined on the basis of experience, for example, as we learn that additional inputs are critical, that additional activities need to be specified, that output measures can be more refined, and so on. Likewise, the community theory of change, of which the program logic model is one component, needs to reflect community experience, as additional critical partners, strategies, and information are identified.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Bruner, C., *Return on Investment Modeling and Analysis: An Annotated Bibliography* (Des Moines, IA: Child and Family Policy Center. 1998).
2. Cook, J. T., and Venner, S., *State Investments in Family Economic Security: A Portfolio Management Approach to State Welfare Investments* (Medford, MA: Tufts University Center on Hunger and Poverty. 1998). See also Karoly, L., “Investing in the Future: Reducing Poverty Through Human Capital Investments.” *Focus*, 21, Fall 2000.
3. Hogan, C. D., and Murphey, D. A., *The Economics of Prevention: Illustrations from Vermont's Experience* (Washington, DC, The Finance Project, 2000).
4. The lessons from the Barre case study drive this point home. See Appendix D.
5. Dr. Charles Lynn Usher is the Wallace H. Kurlat, Sr., Professor of Public Welfare Policy and Administration at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His work for the past decade has focused on evaluation of child welfare reform initiatives.
6. For example, Mark Friedman's work at the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, and the work of the United Way of America.
7. The term is Mark Friedman's.
8. See the many materials on this topic developed by the United Way of America, <http://national.unitedway.org/outcomes/>.
9. Training or other services provided for staff fall within the category of inputs, even though they may indirectly benefit clients.

# Looking Toward Community Well-Being

We're familiar with the concept of paradigm shifts that change our usual way of thinking. Something similar is happening in the human services field. We are beginning to think within a larger scope than we have in the past. These expanding horizons affect how we organize our work and ourselves as a society. The speed of technology transfer and the explosion of information sources are driving this change. Great opportunities will emerge from these conceptual shifts, along with associated dangers.

**Conceptual Shifts** The outcomes-and-indicators approach in the human services field is right in the middle of these changes, but their full effects will take 20 years or more to develop. What we're envisioning is beyond tomorrow, next year, or even the next decade. Paradigm shifts take generations.

*From Program Accountability*

- Activity, input, and productivity indicators
- Hierarchical organization
- Single-point accountability
- Someone to blame
- Orders and directives from above
- Single organization
- State government alone
- How many? How much?
- Statewide programs
- Equity across regions
- Categorical funding
- Program objectives
- One approach
- Credit to a few in charge.

*To Outcomes Responsibility*

- Well-being and outcome indicators
- Teams and partners
- Broad responsibility
- All playing a role
- "Data mirrors" motivating communities
- Multiple organizations
- State and community together
- How much better?
- Targeted local initiatives
- Results across regions
- Paying for results
- Common purpose
- Marketplace of ideas
- Credit to all participants.

Let's review a few of the elements of this great conceptual shift, which is providing the momentum behind the outcomes-and-indicators way of thinking.

*From "Activity and Input" to "Outcomes or Results"*

We used to measure inputs (money, staff, materials) and productivity (number of clients, volume of services) to assess how we were doing. In other words, how many people did we serve? How many home visits did we make? How many hours did we spend? How many miles did we drive? We have always duly reported these types of indicators—and we probably always will. They're necessary for understanding basic productivity, such as how efficient an organization is or how productive its staff.

These performance indicators are important. But one of the conceptual shifts is to look at results as well. Increasingly, we are being asked to measure the *effects* of all that activity. Borrowing the work of Mark Friedman of the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute in Baltimore, we want to draw a simple box.



	QUANTITY	QUALITY
EFFORT	<i>How many did we serve?</i>	<i>How good was our service?</i>
EFFECT	<i>How many products did we create?</i>	<i>How good were our products?</i>

The quadrants on the left tell us “how many” or “how much.” The quadrants on the right tell us “how well.” More and more, our measurement efforts are moving to the right side—the result of an important shift in the way we think, particularly about results. The top row of the table refers to the effort that we put into something. The bottom row of the box shows the effects that the efforts help produce. When we get to the lower-right quadrant, we begin to see the results of the work—its outcomes. This type of measurement is best aligned with the concept of well-being. The *results* of what we do are finally coming to the forefront.

We don’t deny the importance of continuing to measure how much (effort) and how many (units of service), but this new way of thinking about the effect of our work requires a new way of measuring. These days, we’ve started to see outcomes thinking take hold, which also prompts the next observable shift.

*From “Hierarchical Organizations” to “Partnership Teams”*

Governments traditionally are hierarchical in how they do business. Their work is organized in a top-down framework. However, the more that people in communities get involved in the work of improving well-being, the more quickly government’s organizational framework will change. The more technology moves information quickly around decentralized networks, the more that organizational teaming and partnering will become the primary ways of doing business, particularly our work in human services.

The language of outcomes—phrased as common purpose—is well-suited to this new, nonhierarchical style. By addressing our goals directly, new partners are attracted to this work, which is collaborative by nature. This infusion of new resources of human energy and ideas is a major opportunity. Indeed, outcomes work is proceeding primarily at the local level, where communities are providing the greatest innovations. As a result, new forms of civic engagement are reinvigorating the polity. As many observers have noted, citizens’ confidence in government is inversely proportional to their distance from it.<sup>1</sup>

*From “Single-Point Accountability” to “Broad Responsibility”*

Another important conceptual shift associated with the outcomes framework has to do with where responsibility resides. Previously, a single person in authority was accountable for the outcomes of an organization or program. No more. The new framework reflects a change from accountability by those in charge of programs, to a responsibility shared by all participants. As a society, we are all responsible for the problems we share; therefore, we should all bear responsibility for their solution. Outcomes-and-indicators thinking broadens responsibility and asserts that we all have something to do with results—good or bad.

*From “Procedural Directives” to “Data-Based Motivation”*

The old way of working was an authoritarian system that issued directives on programs and procedures. The new way of organizing information opens the door to a new way of thinking and working. Work now involves more self-directed motivation. The Vermont town of Barre is a good example (see Appendix D).

When some of Barre’s natural leaders were shown indicators that were clearly moving in the wrong direction (child abuse, teen pregnancy, and others), they didn’t like what they saw. Most of us don’t like what we see in the mirror when we first get up in the morning, so we do something about it. Putting that mirror in front of our faces motivates us to change. The outcomes way of



thinking is similar to holding a mirror up to a community. The idea is to motivate people, both positively and negatively, to change what they don't like.

*From "Integrated Services" to "Integrated Results"*

Service integration, now about 20 years old, was an important idea when new. Its intent was to provide more convenience for the consumer by co-locating, in one place, the people who provide services. In the world of today, we all have access to each other through technology. In the world of tomorrow, telephones, computers, and televisions will merge into a single instrument. These changes will cause us to focus more on integrated results than on integrated services. Having one central location for services is not as important when anyone can use the Internet to enroll in government programs.

concerned with equity and fairness. However, the needs in specific regions and communities are often very different. An outcomes-and-indicators approach requires us to respond to these specific needs. Outcomes in one community can be different from those in another. Correspondingly, program emphases also vary. Such a conceptual shift puts a different cast on issues of fairness and equity.

*From "Funding Programs" to "Funding Results"*

Human services programs are funded through many different organizations, including the federal government and foundations. Welfare is funded differently from mental health, and both are funded differently from corrections. As a result, we've planned our programs based on what dollars will and won't be available. A

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**As a society, we are all responsible for the problems we share; therefore, we should all bear responsibility for their solution. Outcomes-and-indicators thinking broadens responsibility and asserts that we all have something to do with results—good or bad.**

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The physical co-location of services remains useful, but the real opportunity now lies with the integration of *results*. Instead of a single governmental service (such as child care) having sole responsibility for a result, all stakeholders are now responsible. All community members have something to contribute. Government and communities now work together, particularly as the capacity for community-based services increases.

*From "Statewide Programs" to "Targeted Local Initiatives"*

Instead of promoting statewide programs that attempt to deliver services without respect for location, we are now targeting human services to specific communities for specific results. One result of this shift is that it affects the role of advocates. Advocacy organizations are

shift is occurring, where funders pay instead for specific results, which requires greater flexibility from government. Instead of the objectives of a single program, the common purpose across programs becomes paramount. Specific program objectives are still necessary, but now we also have a common purpose.

Con's trip to Norway uncovered an ambitious common purpose developed by the group there, which was "All Children Have a Human Relationship That They Can Depend On." If realized, such an outcome could have a very significant impact on well-being. Wouldn't it be wonderful if all organizations aimed for a common purpose like that?

## Chapter 19:

### COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

From a decade of outcomes-and-indicators work in Vermont, we have come to know some basic realities. We know that government alone cannot solve the vexing problems in our communities. Nor will government ever be in a position to pay the price tag. We also know that no government program or agency alone, no matter how well-meaning or effective, can solve our communities' problems nor can any single nonprofit agency. We know that the problems are bigger than even multiple programs or agencies can address. Only with all elements and partners together are enough energy and resources available for the enormity of the challenges.

Each of us functions as part of various larger systems. In each system, we need to act as agents of social change. Identification of common purpose across these systems can marshal significant focused human energy for improving our communities. Contributions from all of us—in each of our capacities—will be needed to make a difference. With the synergistic energy available from people working together, we can indeed achieve positive change.

**One Hopeful Town** This theory of change was tested in the town of Barre, Vermont. By a joining a common purpose and identifying well-being outcomes, the people of Barre started on a path to a better quality of life for their community. In the wake of their efforts, Barre saw measurable change in enough indicators to give us hope for similar results in other communities.

The outcomes work in Barre is in its fourth year, a very short time in the overall scheme of things. All members of its steering committee are optimistic that these early stirrings of change can lead to other improvements in well-being over the long term. They also agree that this work must extend over at least a decade before real success can be claimed.

Visualizing the future is often suggested as a means to achieving it. Why not imagine an ideal?

**Ideal Well-Being** Hawaii has a mythic status as a little bit of paradise. Besides its climate and breathtaking scenery, however, there are many important parallels exist between how Native Hawaiians think and live and what the best outcomes work can achieve.

Native Hawaiians' belief in a higher order and common purpose is expressed in their "*pules*," which are reflections held at the beginning of many of their get-togethers. In their view, human relationship is the highest value. They take great stock in knowing each other. This valuing of relationship extends to where they work, which is viewed as a form of family, particularly for newcomers. Yet, Native Hawaiians consider that work in the home or family is the most important. They also believe that *place* is important. They are, in many ways, bonded to the places where they and their forebears have lived and where their children have been raised. Age and wisdom are valued, and communication is intergenerational.

Most important for Native Hawaiians, time does not drive their lives. Relationships come first. If those take time, so be it. They will not constrain their relationships by how much time is available to them.

Native Hawaiians value human-scale communities, a preference consistent with their belief that healthy relationships drive good results. In Native Hawaiian communities, young children are provided opportunities for play and unstructured time. Many Hawaiians believe that a healthy early childhood includes experiences where children have the opportunity to test limits.

They also believe deeply that their culture and their communities should define their future. This belief does not mean they are passive. They believe that everyone can contribute to a healthy future.

**New Ways of Reporting Progress** As important as it is to visualize community well-being, nothing motivates like objective evidence of success (or failure). *The Wall Street Journal* reports on the nation's

economic well-being through the major stock indices, such as the NYSE, the NASDAQ, the NIKKEI, the Dow, and the S&P. In the past decade, analogous “barometers” of social well-being have emerged, such as Marc Miringoff’s Index of Social Health (ISH).<sup>2</sup>

The ISH is a composite of national indicators of social health that together purport to measure quality of life in America. According to its developer, although the Dow Jones Industrial Averages, the Gross Domestic Product, the Index of Leading Economic Indicators, the balance of trade, the inflation rate, and other economic gauges all have their place, they are insufficient as measures of social progress. In fact, it is entirely possible for economic indicators to show “progress,” while important dimensions of social well-being decline. The ISH gathers statistical data on the well-being of America’s children and youth, the accessibility of health care, the quality of education, and the adequacy of housing, as well as the extent of drug abuse, life expectancy, homicides, and lack of health insurance. As Miringoff explains,

*News resonates through society when the market falls one hundred points or interest rates rise one-fourth of one percent. But bells never go off when the poverty of America’s children reaches twenty percent. . . . Yet such events are milestones in the development of society, important signs of its social health, and they should be a regular and conspicuous part of public discussion.*<sup>3</sup>

Worse, because many of these trends are not reported as they occur, their consequences have caught up with us. If declining social indicators were covered as they unfolded, we would not only be more informed but more able to respond effectively. Because of this data vacuum, communities are not able to hold their elected officials accountable.

*A president or a governor is only rarely called to account when there is a significant increase in child abuse (or) teen suicide. . . . Nor is such an official praised when the rate of child poverty fails. The data are not released promptly enough or prominently enough to bring about a public response.*<sup>4</sup>

What if we imagined a parallel to *The Wall Street Journal*—such as the *Well-Being Journal*? It would

report on social indicators of well-being in a variety of ways and in a timely manner. It would show which indicators were improving and which deteriorating and would discuss the interdependence among these indicators, their trends, and the dynamics emerging in the social sphere. This kind of information would provide encouragement, when the news was good, or motivation, when the news was not so good. The following illustrates some of the ways a journal of social indicators would parallel Wall Street’s:

*The Wall Street Journal*

REPORTING ON ECONOMIC INDICATORS

- Summaries of particular industrial sectors, such as transportation and utilities
- Discussion of various mutual funds and their performance
- Activities in futures trading in commodities
- Equity reports for companies
- Current ratios, shown on balance sheets as liquid assets divided by current debt, which represent a company’s ability to pay
- Economic confidence surveys, such as quarterly purchasing-agent surveys
- Analysis of intangible (corporate) assets
- Features on marketplace innovations
- Currency exchange reports
- Regional economic forecasts
- Research profiles of successful businesses.

*The Well-Being Journal*

REPORTING ON SOCIAL INDICATORS

- Summaries of particular social sectors, such as safety, health, education, or the environment
- Discussion of alternative measures of poverty, and their utility
- Activities in support of future-oriented outcomes, such as “Children Are Ready for School”
- Well-being reports for communities
- Improved ratios, which represent expenditures avoided, divided by cost of deteriorating indicators, which represent society’s ability to pay

- Peer approval surveys, such as health risk behavior surveys or Carnegie sampling surveys
- Analysis of intangible (social) assets
- Features on well-being innovations
- Cost–benefit analyses for social indicators
- Regional and neighborhood well-being forecasts
- Research profiles of thriving communities.

Reporting on social indicators would promote a broad range of activity to improve community well-being. Instead of *Wall Street's* focus on “equity of the enterprise,” imagine a focus on “well-being of children, families, and communities.”

As the “bottom line” is *Wall Street's* focus and challenge, so human services must focus on the challenge of their work: “toward what end?”



Bosch, Hieronymus (c.1450-1516). Hell and its Punishments. Right panel from the *Garden of Earthly Delights* triptych. Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain  
CREDIT: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

### Imagining Our

**Future** Around 1500, Hieronymus Bosch painted a remarkable triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. One of the three panels depicts his vision of hell in the future. Here, Bosch shows a disconnected and utterly disturbing view of tomorrow. This remarkable vision of an incoherent world could well have been a foreshadowing of the turn of the present millennium. As one viewer of the painting summed up the prospect,

*There is no horizon there. There is no continuity between actions, there are no pauses, no paths, no pattern, no past, and no future. There is only the clamour of the disparate, fragmentary present. Everywhere there are surprises and sensations, yet nowhere is there any outcome.<sup>5</sup>*

All too often, we perpetuate a similar cacophony in human services work: our fragmented agencies and unconnected programs, the lack of direction or institutional memory, no continuity between inputs and outcomes, no eye on the horizon. Mark Friedman, of the Institute for Fiscal Policy Studies, has an elegantly straightforward way of engaging people that brings an order to our contemporary version of Bosch’s hell. He simply says,

*Find a curve or trend that you want to change and that you feel is important to change, then work together and begin to figure out what it takes to change it.*

In some ways, we have made human services work so complicated that we have lost a simple declarative approach to the challenges. We need to regain that sense of direct simplicity to ensure that our work has direction, coherence, and logic toward outcomes that contribute to a better life for the people we serve.

**Hope for a Future** In a commencement address given at the University of Vermont, Con talked about the motivating power of common purpose, the value of community well-being, and the synergistic energy of people working together. His address provides appropriate motivation not only for college graduates, but for all those who are striving to create better lives in communities. Con urged,

*...as you begin the inexorable journey, I want to leave you with one sustaining thought...—sink deep roots in this very real-time world and become an active, contributing, challenging, engaged, and supportive presence in the communities of your lives.*

*Through your communities, you will shape the future. And in your communities, leave room in your full lives to serve others in both large and modest ways. There is no higher pleasure accompanied by any higher satisfaction than contributing*

*to leaving a place stronger, better, more viable, more effective, and more beautiful than it was when you arrived.*

*And I don't confine this thought to "community" in the traditional sense of the Ozzie-and-Harriet world. . . . I do mean those communities, but I also mean the new communities born of our increasing sense of globalness and the knowledge of how we are increasingly tied together with peoples around the world. I also mean communities of poor and disenfranchised, who are being increasingly left behind, even in this time of enormous economic prosperity and even as they serve us in ways that make our lives richer. I also mean real-time electronic communities that are more and more a part of our day. I mean all communities of interest, communities of common purpose, and communities of caring human beings.*

*And for you 900 Vermonters graduating today, you have a special opportunity and accompanying obligation. You have grown up in a place that understands and highly values its sense of community.*

*In Vermont, you have lived in communities where 100 percent of the children are immunized; where child abuse, teen pregnancies, and crime are the lowest in the nation; where, in some places, birthday parties are held for one-year-olds, rich or poor; where the dream of all children being ready for school is unfolding all around us. . . . and will be achieved. You live in communities where people deeply care about their environment, and where they do the many things, big and small, to improve it.*

*You live in communities where children at the annual Easter egg hunts are rewarded with books. . . . You live in communities where all newborns, rich or poor, are offered early baby visits by nurses and neighbors to help our children and families get off to the right start. You, Vermonters, live in communities that are the envy of the nation.*

*Your opportunity and obligation is to spread that sense of community across this nation and the world. You know and have experienced the human benefits of caring communities in a state with its rich history of shires, town meetings, and very personal democracy. Go out and regenerate that sense in the new places where you will live and work. This nation needs you to do that.*

*There is more untapped human energy in all of us for the betterment of mankind than there is all of the wealth in the world. Each of us, contributing in ever so small and modest ways—in our work and our community lives, consistently, interactively, and cumulatively over time—can make our world a much better place for our children and their children.*

*Yes, it does take a village to raise a child. . . . and it takes each and every one of us to create those villages, villages of ideas, of commitment, of caring. All of those human assets—collected, coalesced, amalgamated, and accumulated over time—will bring great benefit to others and contentment to you along this glorious road to fulfillment and achievement.*

*Appreciate, enjoy, and savor the journey. . . . We can't wait to see what you will do with it.*

#### ENDNOTES

1. Osborne, D., and Gaebler, T. A., *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit Is Transforming the Public Sector* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992).
2. Index of Social Health, developed by Marc Miringoff of the Institute for Innovation in Social Policy at Fordham University, is based on a set of socioeconomic indicators dealing with issues of health, morality, inequality, and access to services that affect individuals and society.
3. A Review of *The Social Health of the Nation* by Miringoff and Miringoff in *Challenge Magazine*, November–December 1999.
4. Miringoff, M., and Miringoff, M.L., *The Social Health of the Nation: How America Is Really Doing* (New York: Oxford University Press, June 1999).
5. Berger, J., "Welcome to the Abyss", *The Guardian*, November 20, 1999 (courtesy of Mr. Michael Pinnock of North Londonshire, England).



## Appendix A:

### AN OUTCOMES-AND-INDICATORS SAMPLING

#### ► OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS

##### *Pregnant Women and Young Children Thrive*

- Rate of Low Birth Weight
- Percentage of Pregnant Women Smoking
- Percentage of Births With Adequate Prenatal Care
- Percentage of Women With Prenatal Care in First Trimester
- Infant Mortality Rate
- Toddler Immunization Rate
- Percentage of Young Children With Health Insurance
- Rate of Injuries Resulting in Hospitalization (ages 0–9)
- Percentage of Young Children in Poverty.

##### *Children Are Ready for School*

- Child Abuse and Neglect Rates (birth to age 6)
- Rate of Childhood Lead Poisoning
- Rate of Childhood Asthma
- Rate of Hunger or Malnutrition
- Rate of Preschool Participation
- Percentage of Kindergartners Fully Immunized
- Percentage of Children Ready for Kindergarten.

##### *Children Succeed in School*

- Rate of School Attendance
- High School Graduation Rate
- Student Suspension Rate
- Percentage of Students Reading at Grade Level by Third Grade
- Student:Teacher Ratio
- English/Language Arts Assessment Scores
- Math Assessment Scores
- Percentage of Students With Special Education Plans
- Scholastic Assessment Test Scores.

##### *Children Live in Stable, Supported Families*

- Percentage of Children in Poverty
- Percentage of Child Support Paid
- Rate of Child Abuse and Neglect
- Rate of Out-of-Home Placements (ages 0–17)
- Percentage of Families With Health Insurance.

##### *Youth Choose Healthy Behaviors*

- Percentage of Youth Involved in Sports/ Recreation Activities
- Percentage of Youth Involved in Religious Activities
- Teen Arrest Rate
- Percentage of Youth Involved in After-School Activities
- Percentage of Youth With Summer Jobs
- Percentage of Students Smoking Cigarettes
- Percentage of Students Using Alcohol
- Percentage of Students Using Marijuana
- Rate of Teen Sexually Transmitted Diseases
- Rate of Teen Pregnancy (ages 15–19)
- Rate of Injuries (ages 10–17) Resulting in Hospitalization
- Custody Rate for “Unmanageable” Children
- Rate of Court Dispositions for Delinquency
- Rate of Delinquents in Custody
- Rate of Teen Violent Deaths.

##### *Youth Become Successful Adults*

- Employment Rate for Youths (ages 18–25)
- Rates of Continuation in Postsecondary Education or Vocational Training
- Voter Registration Rate for Youths (ages 18–25)
- Percentage of Youth Involved in Service to Community
- Percentage of High School Seniors With Plans for Education, Training, or Employment
- Rate of New Families at Risk
- Rate Out-of-Home Placements (ages 18–24)
- Rate of Injuries (ages 18–24) Resulting in Hospitalization
- Rate of Teen Nonviolent Deaths.



*Families and Individuals Live in Safe and Supportive Communities*

- Rate of Injuries (ages 25–64) Resulting in Hospitalization
- Rate of Out-of-Home Placements (ages 25+)
- Percentage of Adults Who Smoke
- Percentage of Adults Who Are Binge Drinkers
- Rate of Petitions Filed for Relief From Domestic Abuse
- Rate of Adult Victims of Abuse and Neglect
- Suicide Rate
- Violent Crime Rate
- Percentage of People Above Poverty Level
- Median Family Income
- Average Annual Wage
- Rate of Job Creation
- Percentage Living in Affordable Housing
- Percentage Met Need for Child Care.

*Elders and People With Disabilities Are Resources in Their Communities and Live With Dignity and Independence in Settings They Prefer*

- Rate of Injuries (ages 65+) Resulting in Hospitalization
- Rate of Elder Suicide
- Per Capita Usage of Nursing Homes.

## Appendix B:

### WHAT BUSINESS LEADERS CAN DO

► *Participate in Determining a “Livable Income.”*

Business people are experts at using spreadsheets to run “what-if” scenarios. They could contribute to creating a “market basket” understanding of what it takes to raise a family.

► *Find How Each Employee Gets to Work, the Time It Takes, and the Costs.*

Many businesses provide their CEOs with transportation. They know exactly how long it takes to get from home to the workplace. A human resource department could undertake a survey to determine how long it takes each employee to get to work and how much it costs. Such a survey would likely reveal some complicated and expensive arrangements. At the least, the survey would show how much of their employees’ time is spent commuting.

► *Visit a Child Care Setting and Judge the Quality.*

We all want a good start for our children, but quality child care for employees is, in addition, a critical investment for businesses. Numerous studies have shown that losses in employee productivity result when parents either don’t have reliable child care or are concerned with the quality of their child care arrangements. This visit would be an eye-opener for a CEO.

► *Identify Employees Who Are Beating the Poverty Odds and Publicly Celebrate Them.*

Some employees, especially those among the working poor, are beating the odds everyday. Occasional recognition in a very personal manner brings well-earned attention to their achievement. A parallel in the world of government is the “High Achiever” program in Michigan. The governor and other dignitaries, accompanied by the media, personally visit families

and publicly celebrate their successes, which are achieved against considerable odds.

◆ *Calculate Employees' "Contribution to Overhead."*

Businesses calculate how much a program or individual contributes to revenue (net product cost) to determine how much that person or activity offsets overhead. This concept of "contribution to overhead" is a key aspect of financial analysis.

◆ *Find Out How Many Employees Have Health Care Coverage.*

This information probably already exists with the company's Director of Human Resources. In spite of expanded availability of health coverage for the working poor in most states, some employees are still unaware of their eligibility. This information could serve as a motivator and initial database for an enrollment effort.

◆ *Calculate the Cost of Employee Turnover.*

Turnover can cost as much as one-half the salary and benefits of the employee who leaves. In addition to recruitment costs, the cost of retraining is a major cost to the business, particularly when replacing experienced employees. This brings home the value of human capital.

◆ *Find Out What Percentage of Employees' Income Is for Housing and/or Raising a Child.*

The cost of housing can run as high as 40 or 50 percent of an employee's income. In this era of near full employment and occupancy rates near 100 percent, employers need to understand the difficulty of finding and keeping affordable housing. The costs of raising a child are also important to quantify and appreciate, especially for employers.

◆ *Construct a Personal Balance Sheet With and for Employees.*

Balance sheets are the lifeblood of a business. Continual analysis of balance sheet elements and their changing

trends over time helps businesses identify opportunities and dangers. Business can apply the same techniques to understand better the circumstances of each employee and his or her family.

◆ *Find Out How Close the Nearest Bank Is to an Employee's Home.*

Business depends heavily on the availability of banking and financial institutions. Realizing the paucity of such services in certain neighborhoods creates a greater appreciation of the difficulty many employees face in achieving the building blocks of basic economic independence others take for granted, such as maintaining a savings account.

◆ *Calculate the Difference Between a Bank's Check Cashing Fee and What's Charged by the Storefront "Check Casher."*

Business knows the value of fees and interest rates. A calculation of the check-cashing fees charged by those storefront operations as compared with those of a regular bank will probably exceed what business considers a reasonable "profit." Over an annual cycle, the employee's payroll check becomes an expense item.

◆ *Determine the Intangible Asset Value of Employees.*

Intangibles, such as employee loyalty, experience, and longevity, have true value to a business. Calculating that value, even in a rough estimate, gives business people a sense of the collective value of their employees, beyond their day-to-day contributions to the work at hand.

◆ *List the Community Contributions Employees Make Outside the Workplace.*

Business owners are often unaware of the contributions that employees make to their communities. Forward-thinking businesses feature those contributions in their promotional material. Beyond simple pride in their employees' off-the-job accomplishments, promoting employees' contributions to their communities adds intangible value to a business.

◆ *Take Inventory of the Nonfinancial Assets of Employees.*

Employees often have impressive skills and knowledge beyond those needed for their work. This kind of inventory, similar to accounting for intangible assets, can result in ideas for new kinds of business activity with benefits for the business and the employees.

◆ *Calculate “Debt-to-Worth” and “Current Ratios” for Employees.*

“Debt-to-worth” is a regularly monitored business metric, which drives marketing, purchasing, and borrowing decisions. The insights related to this ratio are readily transferable to the situations of individuals and families. The “current ratio” of a business simply reflects the ability of the business to pay current liabilities on time. The ratio divides current liabilities (obligations to be paid within 30 to 60 days) by current assets (cash or cash equivalents, such as current receivables). A current ratio of 1 or greater means that current assets are available to cover current liabilities. A business could share this technique with its employees to track their families’ expenses.

◆ *Help Employees Construct a Family Budget.*

Budgets and business go together. Budgets are usually constructed with market realities in mind. Likewise, family budgets can be constructed using market basket pricing as the basis. Either a committee of the business or key decision makers could help employees construct such budgets from scratch.

◆ *Compare Per Capita Education Cost in Employees’ School Districts With That in the Employer’s.*

In most states, the level of school support varies widely from place to place. In a business setting, the per capita costs for each school district represented by employees are relatively easy to list. The probable variance on a business-by-business basis could initiate important regional and statewide policy debate and action.

◆ *Find Out If the Children of Employees Have a Computer at Home and Access to the Internet.*

Access to computers is essential for participating fully in the new economy. Business people live with their laptops. Access to Internet services from every neighborhood will be a major feature of future personal economic prosperity. Business is working hard to cultivate computer literacy for employees, and competition for employees with these skills is fierce. A survey of employees’ computer access at home could trigger specific plans and actions by the business.

◆ *Focus on the Daily Unrecognized Actions of Employees That Reflect Caring and Thank Them.*

Issues of dignity, caring, approval, and affection are essential to overall health and well-being. Knowing and acting on these fundamentals can result in important positive intangibles to the business and an overall healthier workforce.

◆ *Calculate the Value of Business Procurement Locally and Add a Multiplier.*

Local procurement by businesses brings great value to a community. When a reasonable multiplier representing subsequent economic activity is factored in, the numbers become even more impressive and generate a mutual sense of interdependence between business and the community.

◆ *Estimate the Overall Qualitative (Intangible) Value That the Business Adds to the Life of the Community.*

Businesses don’t often have the chance to think through their overall contributions to a community. Doing so also provides an opportunity for a community to better appreciate what a particular business brings to its quality of life.

◆ *Find Out Where the Children of Employees Play Ball, and Sponsor a Local Sports Team.*

Seeing where children play brings us all back to our roots. By being aware of and nurturing more of those opportunities for the next generation, business makes an invaluable investment in the future. If where children play or the equipment available to them is inadequate, businesses have a great opportunity to remedy that. For example, having the company name and logo on uniforms can promote good will among employees and their children in the neighborhoods where they live.

◆ *Sponsor a Local Sports Team for Employees.*

A company-sponsored sports team develops great *esprit de corps*. One of the benefits of team sports is bringing people from all levels of the company together.

◆ *Bring Health Fairs to Where Employees Live or to the Business Site.*

Early detection and treatment of illness is good for both the employee and the employer. Better yet is prevention. Bringing a health fair to the business site or the employees' neighborhood has both a practical and a public relations value.

◆ *Determine If an Employee or Group of Employees Want Ongoing Work as Subcontractors.*

Under the right circumstances, employees who sub-contract work can gain invaluable business experience. Outsourcing has its own cost–benefits to a company as well as to the employees who may develop an appetite for being in business themselves.

◆ *Reflect on the Contributions All Working People Make to the Richness of Our Lives.*

Periods of prosperity and low unemployment bring insights to businesses on how difficult entry-level jobs are to fill, particularly in service industries. As these shortages have accumulated, the contributions of the working poor to the comforts and services we take for granted become more important. Perhaps this self-interest will lead to more ready acceptance by both business and government that those who work hard and play by the rules deserve a basic level of economic support.

# Appendix C:

## 2002 VERMONT PROFILE OF WELL-BEING

### SUMMARY OF VERMONT 2002 DATA

	PREVIOUS YEARS' VT DATA	MOST RECENT VT DATA	MOST RECENT U.S. DATA	VERMONT'S RANK AMONG STATES	
<i>Families, Youth, and Citizens Are Engaged in Their Community's Decisions and Activities</i>					
B+	% Voting-age population voting in general election	58.9 (1980)	65.4 (2000)	54.2 (1996)	18th (1996)
<i>Pregnant Women and Young Children Thrive</i>					
A+	% Births to women with early (1st trimester) prenatal care	78.2 (1980)	88.5 (2000)	83.2 (2000)	6th (2000)
A+	% Births to women with late or no prenatal care	2.7 (1980)	2.0 (2000)	3.9 (2000)	6th (2000)
F	% Smoking during pregnancy	22.6 (1990)	19.9 (2000)	12.2 (2000)	41st (1996) <sup>46 STATES REPORTING</sup>
A+	% Low-birth-weight infants (<5.5 pounds)	6.0 (1980)	6.1 (2000)	7.6 (2000*)	5th (2000*)
NR	% Families w/"new baby" visits (% annual births)	31.0 (1994)	87.0 (2000)	Not available	Not available
A+	Infant mortality (deaths <1 year per 1,000 live births)	10.9 (1980)	6.0 (2000)	6.9 (2000)	9th (1999)
A+	% Two-year-olds fully immunized	68.0 (1989)	83.0 (2000)	76.0 (2000)	1st (1991)
<i>Children Are Ready for School</i>					
NR	% Children ready for kindergarten		(2001)		
	Approaches to learning	Not available	61	Not available	Not available
	Cognitive development and general knowledge		68		
	Communication		80		
	Social-emotional development		63		
NR	% Schools ready for young children and their families		(2001)		
	Smooth transitions to school		81		
	Instruction and staff development	Not available	67	Not available	Not available
	Resources		94		
	Partnership with community		71		
NR	Rate of child abuse and neglect (ages 0-4) Confirmed victims per 10,000 children ages 0-4	97.2 (1990)	70.0 (2000)	Not available	Not available
NR	% Young child poverty (ages 0-5)	22.0 (1979-83)	14.0 (1994-98)	23.0 (1994-98)	Not available
<b>KEY</b> A+ MUCH BETTER THAN AVERAGE (ranked 1-10) B+ BETTER THAN AVERAGE (ranked 11-20) C AVERAGE (ranked 21-30) D WORSE THAN AVERAGE (ranked 31-40) F MUCH WORSE THAN AVERAGE (ranked 41-50) NR NOT RATED (state ranking not available) * PRELIMINARY					

SUMMARY OF VERMONT 2002 DATA— *Continued*

		PREVIOUS YEARS' VT DATA	MOST RECENT VT DATA	MOST RECENT U.S. DATA	VERMONT'S RANK AMONG STATES
<i>Children Succeed in School</i>					
A+	Pupil–teacher ratio	14.8 (1980)	12.8 (1998)	16.5 (1998)	1st (1998)
NR	% Schools participating in school meals programs (breakfast and lunch)	12.3 (1989)	78.7 (2001)	Not available	Not available
NR	% Students (grades 9–12) who did not go to school during the past 30 days because they felt unsafe	4.0 (1995)	4.0 (2001)	5.0 (1999)	Not available
NR	% Students (grades 9–12) in a fight on school property in past 12 months	15.0 (1995)	13.0 (2001)	14.0 (1999)	Not available
<i>Children Live in Stable, Supported Families</i>					
A+	% Children in poverty	14.0 (1979)	13.0 (1993–97)	20.0 (1993–97)	6th (1993–97)
A+	% Births to single parents	11.8 (1978)	28.2 (2000)	33.2 (2000)	9th (2000)
B+	% Families with children headed by a single parent	21.0 (1984–86)	26.0 (1996–98)	27.0 (1996–98)	18th (1996–98)
A+	% Child support enforcement cases with collections	23.5 (1985)	64.4 (2000*)	41.6 (2000*)	7th (2000*)
A+	% Parentage determined for out-of-wedlock child support	42.0 (1988)	90.0 (2000)	64.0 (1998)	3rd (1998)
A+	% Children with health insurance	85.0 (1980–84)	96.0 (2000)	86.0 (1992–96)	1st (tied 1992–96)
A+	Children reported abused or neglected per 10,000	184.0 (1983)	178.0 (1999)	410.0 (1999)	3rd (1999)
D	Children in substitute care per 10,000 children	53.4 (1983)	84.3 (1998)	70.7 (1996)	36th (1994) <sup>41 STATES REPORTING</sup>
<i>Youth Choose Healthy Behaviors</i>					
NR	% 8th–12th graders participating in youth programs	Not available	30.0 (2001)	Not available	Not available
NR	% 8th–12th graders volunteering in their communities	Not available	48.0 (2001)	Not available	Not available
NR	% 9th–12th graders who smoked cigs. in past 30 days	34.0 (1993)	23.0 (2001)	35.0 (1999)	Not available
NR	% 9th–12th graders who used alcohol in past 30 days	53.0 (1993)	48.0 (2001)	50.0 (1999)	Not available
F	% Teen alcohol-related motor vehicle crash deaths	51.0 (1990)	50.0 (2000)	37.0 (2000)	45th (2000)
NR	% 9th–12th graders who used marijuana in past 30 days	19.0 (1993)	30.0 (2001)	27.0 (1999)	Not available
NR	Young teen pregnancy rate (ages 15–17 per 1,000)	38.5 (1974)	19.2 (2000)	63.7 (1997)	Not available
A+	Teen birth rate (ages 15–19, births per 1,000)	44.3 (1974)	23.4 (2000)	48.5 (2000)	2nd (2000)
<b>KEY</b>					
A+	MUCH BETTER THAN AVERAGE (ranked 1–10)				
B+	BETTER THAN AVERAGE (ranked 11–20)				
C	AVERAGE (ranked 21–30)				
D	WORSE THAN AVERAGE (ranked 31–40)				
F	MUCH WORSE THAN AVERAGE (ranked 41–50)				
NR	NOT RATED (state ranks not available)				
*	PRELIMINARY				



SUMMARY OF VERMONT 2002 DATA— *Continued*

		PREVIOUS YEARS' VT DATA	MOST RECENT VT DATA	MOST RECENT U.S. DATA	VERMONT'S RANK AMONG STATES
<i>Youth Successfully Transition to Adulthood</i>					
NR	% High school grads entering postsecondary education	47.2 (1978)	63.1 (1998)	65.6 (1998)	<i>Not available</i>
B+	% Youth (ages 16–19) not in school or working	11.0 (1984–86)	8.0 (1996–98)	9.0 (1996–98)	18th (1996–98)
NR	% Youth (ages 16–19) unemployed	13.1 (1981)	7.7 (2000)	13.1 (2000)	<i>Not available</i>
A+	% New families at risk (first births to unmarried)	6.9 (1980)	9.8 (2000)	11.0 (1990)	3rd (1990)
A+	% Repeat births to teens (second or >order births as %)	18.1 (1986)	13.5 (2000)	21.5 (1999*)	2nd (1996)
<i>Elders and People With Disabilities Live With Dignity and Independence in Settings They Prefer</i>					
A+	% Older people (ages 65+) living in poverty	12.4 (1989)	7.6 (1997–99)	9.7 (1999)	10th (1997–99)
NR	% Older people (ages 65+) engaging in some leisure-time physical activity	54.2 (1991)	64.0 (2000)	<i>Not available</i>	<i>Not available</i>
NR	% Older people (ages 65+) at risk for depression	<i>Not available</i>	7.7 (1998)	<i>Not available</i>	<i>Not available</i>
C	% Elder population (ages 65+) living in nursing homes	5.0 (1992)	4.6 (1998)	4.5 (2000)	28th (1996)
A+	% Special education students in regular classrooms	79.0 (1981)	82.9 (1998)	46.4 (1998)	1st (1998)
C	% Population with work disabilities	8.5 (1980)	7.9 (1990)	8.2 (1990)	25th (1990)
B+	% People with disabilities in the labor force	41.1 (1980)	48.2 (1990)	39.3 (1990)	12th (1990)
NR	% Successful job placements of vocational rehab clients	63.0 (1994)	68.0 (2000)	<i>Not available</i>	<i>Not available</i>
A+	People with mental illness institutionalized per 100,000	48.0 (1980)	8.1 (1999)	21.1 (1998)	4th (1998)
A+	Developmental disabled institutionalized per 100,000	33.5 (1988)	0 (2000)	19.5 (1998)	1st (tied 1998)
<b>KEY</b>					
A+	MUCH BETTER THAN AVERAGE (ranked 1–10)				
B+	BETTER THAN AVERAGE (ranked 11–20)				
C	AVERAGE (ranked 21–30)				
D	WORSE THAN AVERAGE (ranked 31–40)				
F	MUCH WORSE THAN AVERAGE (ranked 41–50)				
NR	NOT RATED (state ranks not available)				
*	PRELIMINARY				

SUMMARY OF VERMONT 2002 DATA— *Continued*

		PREVIOUS YEARS' VT DATA	MOST RECENT VT DATA	MOST RECENT U.S. DATA	VERMONT'S RANK AMONG STATES
<i>Families and Individuals Live in Safe and Supportive Communities</i>					
A+	Violent crimes per 100,000 people	179.0 (1980)	114.0 (2000)	506.0 (2000)	3rd (2000)
A+	Homicides per 100,000 people	1.9 (1989)	1.5 (2000)	5.5 (2000)	5th (2000)
B+	Property crimes per 100,000 people	4,810 (1980)	2,873 (2000)	3,618 (2000)	12th (2000)
C	Motor vehicle crashes deaths ( <i>per 100,000, age-adjusted</i> )	24.7 (1980)	12.1 (2000)	15.5 (1999)	18th (1999)
A+	Incarceration rate per 100,000 people	67.0 (1980)	218.0 (2000)	478.0 (2000)	7th (2000)
B+	% Adults who smoke cigarettes	30.0 (1982)	21.5 (2000)	23.2 (2000)	17th (2000)
D	% Adults who are "binge drinkers" ( <i>5 or more drinks on a single occasion in the past 30 days</i> )	21.0 (1990)	20.5 (2000)	14.9 (2000)	36th ( <i>tied</i> 1999)
C	Alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes ( <i>per 100,000</i> )	12.2 (1988)	5.1 (2000)	5.9 (2000)	19th (2000)
B+	% Adults ( <i>age 18 +</i> ) who are obese	11.2 (1990)	18.4 (2000)	20.1 (2000)	17th (1999)
A+	% Adults who get regular and sustained exercise	22.4 (1992)	24.7 (2000)	21.8 (2000)	8th (2000)
NR	Deaths from heart disease ( <i>per 100,000, age-adjusted</i> )	284.0 (1990)	230.0 (2000)	206.0 (1998)	<i>Not available</i>
NR	Deaths from stroke ( <i>per 100,000, age-adjusted</i> )	65.0 (1990)	55.0 (2000)	63.0 (1998)	<i>Not available</i>
NR	Deaths from lung cancer ( <i>per 100,000, age-adjusted</i> )	52.6 (1985)	53.4 (2000)	56.0 (1999)	<i>Not available</i>
NR	Suicides per 100,000 people ( <i>age-adjusted</i> )	15.8 (1984)	12.3 (2000)	10.6 (1999)	<i>Not available</i>
D	Per capita income ( <i>in 2000 dollars</i> )	\$17,188 (1979)	\$26,901 (2000)	\$29,676 (2000)	32nd (2000)
D	Average annual wage ( <i>in 2000 dollars</i> )	\$23,278 (1981)	\$28,693 (2000*)	\$35,305 (2000*)	33rd (2000*)
C	Median household income ( <i>in 2000 dollars</i> )	\$38,307 (1985-87)	\$40,908 (1998-00)	\$41,789 (1998-00)	27th (1998-00)
A+	Unemployment rate	5.0 (1990)	2.9 (2000)	4.0 (2000)	7th (2000)
C	% Population in poverty	13.6 (1981-83)	10.1 (1998-00)	11.9 (1998-00)	21st (1998-00)
A+	Average monthly ANFC pay per family ( <i>current spending</i> )	\$500 (1989)	\$520 (2000)	\$357 (1999)	4th (1999)
NR	% Population with health insurance	91.2 (1989)	91.6 (2000)	86.0 (2000)	<i>Ranks not reliable</i>
D	Median home value	\$67,000 (1980)	\$95,500 (1990)	\$79,100 (1990)	39th (1990)
D	% Households with children paying 30% or more of income for housing costs	<i>Not available</i>	28.0 (1993)	28.0 (1993)	37th (1993)
<b>KEY</b>					
A+	MUCH BETTER THAN AVERAGE ( <i>ranked 1-10</i> )				
B+	BETTER THAN AVERAGE ( <i>ranked 11-20</i> )				
C	AVERAGE ( <i>ranked 21-30</i> )				
D	WORSE THAN AVERAGE ( <i>ranked 31-40</i> )				
F	MUCH WORSE THAN AVERAGE ( <i>ranked 41-50</i> )				
NR	NOT RATED ( <i>state ranks not available</i> )				
*	PRELIMINARY				

# Appendix D:

## THE BARRE STORY

Barre is a community of about 10,000 people. It is a blue-collar town. Several large granite companies, which make monuments and facings for buildings and gravestones, are located here. The community has considerable ethnic diversity because of successive waves of immigrants who came to work in the quarries. Many were stonecutters. The Italians came first, then the French came down through Canada, followed by Syrians, Lebanese, and Spaniards. Barre is a little community very rich in some ways. Yet it has also suffered some of the same kind of decline and corrosion in its community life as did many other small towns trying to make the transition from an industrial past to a 21st-century future.

**Measuring Results** About seven years ago, the Vermont Agency of Human Services began publishing indicator data on a number of outcomes. Con looked at the negative data for Barre and became very concerned. He quietly went to a couple of the political leaders in that community and told them that the data were being published, which they might not like. Some difficult questions could result, but he wanted them to know ahead of time so that we could deal with them together.

For example, Barre's young teen pregnancy rate compared poorly with the state and county averages. As a result, Barre got organized. People began coming together and paying attention to this and other indicators. They began to use the messaging techniques of public health, local-access television, and a whole variety of community-based strategies. Consequently, those numbers have improved over the past four years.

The rates for young teen pregnancies at the state and county level also improved over this period. We recently got the 1999 figures, and the rates continue to decline. No real money went into that community for this. The

reduction in teen pregnancies was a function of focused human energy, of people caring and spreading the word, and of paying closer attention to the teenagers.

The rate of child abuse and neglect for the same community was an even worse story. In 1994, Barre's rate was almost three times that of the county or state. Since then, Barre's rate has improved. Now, these happened to be the worst pieces of information that we had, but they were also the ones that emotionally connected to the people of Barre. They were shocked. They had just heard about these things in a vague and general way, but the data they saw were unacceptable. They asked, "*What do we have to do to change it?*"

School dropout rates in Vermont are nothing to be proud of; they are high across the state. Barre was no different but, at this point, their rate was beginning to skyrocket. There was nothing like publishing the data—spread around through public access television, public forums, meetings with the school board, posters—to get the community excited about this. If you were a principal of the high school in Barre, what do you think you would do? You'd work hard. You don't want those kind of negative numbers associated with your watch.

What makes the difference between a young person staying in school and dropping out is not much in objective terms. It can be paying a little attention, it can be a little human energy, it can be a little more caring. That is what happened in Barre. We have also seen some dramatic changes in eighth graders' use of cigarettes and marijuana. Folks in Barre spent most of their time and energy addressing issues for youngsters in the elementary school. Now those kids are moving into the eighth grade, and we are starting to see some real results. We won't go over every one of them here, but this community is on the move.

**Important Lessons Learned** Things are happening in Barre. The more that the indicator data are published, the more interest people take and the more they want to see the data improve, which makes our job easier.

### *Leadership Is Key*

Leadership took several paths in Barre, and all are instructive. Getting local political and community leaders aboard early was important.<sup>1</sup> Leadership at the state level, early on and in a personal way, was equally important.<sup>2</sup> What's more, the leaders from both the state and local levels were able to work together and develop the personal relationships that would see them through this work. Having leaders at all levels come to solid agreement around the theme of "Learning for Life," and the strategies associated with it, served as an important foundation for the entire project.

### *Data Help Drive the Process*

The public reaction to Barre's indicator data clearly put the larger process in motion. The city's commitment to changing these negative trends was also instrumental in its getting financial support from the Danforth Foundation. Staying on top of the data and sharing news of changes infused continuing energy into the process.

In this regard, the role of the state was essential. Only the state had the capacity to provide accurate, consistent data on a regular basis. Keep in mind that Barre had no full-time staff to devote to the project. The *Community Profiles* and the state department of education's school report cards were welcomed as key sources of data to be monitored over time.

Presentation of the data in trend-line format made it easy for local media and general public to grasp quickly the fundamental question, namely, "*Are things getting better or worse, and how quickly?*"

### *Outsiders Play an Important Role*

The idea that a community can come together, analyze their problems, grapple with them, and develop a sustained action plan may, in certain cases, be optimistic. In the case of Barre's work, people from outside played occasional but important parts in the process. The state's early identification of the data and decision to share them; the Danforth Foundation's willingness to

provide modest financial support, a gentle prodding about the data and evaluation; and occasional participation of key leaders from the Agencies of Human Services and Education, all were important partners with Barre residents in working toward their common purpose, "Learning for Life."

### *Facilitation Holds Things Together*

Professional facilitation proved to be essential at several points during the project. This was particularly true at the level of committees.<sup>3</sup> Another place this was particularly helpful was around the identification of broadly shared "community values," where having one passionate citizen facilitate a community-wide discussion was invaluable.

### *Constancy Is Essential*

To generate energy within organizations and people is relatively easy around short-term efforts and projects. Often, however, that energy quickly dissipates, and people's interests and concern gravitate elsewhere. The Barre Steering Committee, a volunteer group of very busy people, was able to sustain regular meetings and events over a four-year period. We believe part of the explanation for this was that, as the data started to show improvement, new energy was infused into the effort. Regularly publicizing results may be one of the critical factors in this kind of sustainability.

### *A Sense of Community History Is a Cardinal Asset*

The people of Barre are rooted in a strong sense of history and community. This asset was one of the intangibles that made Barre a good bet from the beginning. This community pride could be felt by some of those "outsiders" who first got involved more than four years ago, when they visited during the city's Ethnic Celebration. Whether this sense of community and history is essential for others' success is an open question, but we know that, in this case, it certainly made a positive contribution.

### *Having a Table*

At several times during the multiyear process, there was discussion about how the project had brought people together to the same table where the knowledge and work of each could be shared with others. The regular communication brought both a set of organizing themes to the work and opportunities to connect the work in ways not envisioned before. Productive human relationships were formed, ones that would not have happened without the project.

### *A Branded Name Is Important*

Even though very few people in Barre know who, where, or what the Danforth Foundation is, many know the name has something to do with some kind of area-wide improvement effort. The Danforth name appeared regularly in grants, news releases, press photographs, and program documents. The “Danforth Project” became a shorthand way to explain the effort. The lesson is that some brand name that represents what an effort like this is all about can be an important intangible asset to the effort. In the case of Barre, the Danforth image served that purpose well.

### *Short-Term, Visible, Community Projects Keep Energy Levels Up*

Although we’ve mentioned the value of constancy, a series of short-term, visible, and stimulating projects brings periodic infusions of energy and accomplishment to the effort. The hundreds of children at the Easter Egg hunt in the city park, who traded in the eggs that they collected for young readers’ books, is an example of this kind of event: entertaining, built on a pre-existing tradition, and with a “value-added” dimension (in this case, literacy).<sup>4</sup>

### *Many False Starts*

One area where our original hopes for the program design fell short was the idea that a local group could conduct solid research, such as regarding the impact of specific interventions or educational models. It became clear early on that relying almost exclusively

on volunteers wasn’t compatible with carrying out research according to the classic model. Attempts at hiring a coordinator never took root, and the steering committee eventually felt comfortable with a more informal management structure. As a result, a systematic examination of the role research could play in the project was never a major part of the deliberations. Looking back, one solution would have been to enter into a partnership with the University of Vermont to undertake that part of the agenda.

### ENDNOTES

1. Early buy-in by schools’ Superintendent Lyman Amsden, Mayor Paul Dupree, School Board Chair Steve McKenzie, and Alderman/Representative Paul Poirer were critical.
2. By Education Commissioner Hull and the Secretary of Human Services.
3. One example was when Diana Webster and Brian Ward of the Vermont Prevention Institute, provided ongoing service to the “Better Barre Coalition: New Directions Planning Effort.”
4. Paul Costello, the Executive Director of ABE (Adult Basic Education) proved to be adept and creative in these efforts.

# Appendix E:

## THE BRATTLEBORO STORY

Brattleboro has within our state the longest history of community partnerships, as far as we can tell. Its premier partnership is the Alliance for Building Community (ABC), which began as a group of volunteers.

**1987** ABC was established when 10 regional health and human services providers, plus a local legislator and a newspaper editor, came together around a common purpose. In those early days, the partnership's focus was on the health and well-being of families. ABC's management structure was very informal, with a rotating volunteer secretary who kept track of the work.

**1991–92** Four years later, the membership had grown to 25 health and human services providers. At this time, ABC took on issues concerning teen parents, now emerging as a visible area of need in the community. A year later, the provider group adopted as a principle, "Children's Success Cannot Be Separate From Family and Community Success."

At the same time, Vermont's Human Services Agency and Education Department were beginning to forge the statewide common purpose known as "Success by Six." A small collaborative in the Brattleboro area was being developed around that work. In 1992, Success by Six and ABC joined forces.

Also in 1992, a substantial effort began to encourage community engagement through a project entitled "It Takes a Village."

Between 1992 and 1995, It Takes a Village was funded by Success by Six. Success by Six and ABC came together to sponsor and organize Brattleboro's "Last Night Celebration." This alcohol-free event on New Year's Eve put family and children at the center of community-wide celebrations.

The teen parent project, begun earlier in the year, was incorporated at this time into another collaborative group, the Child Protection Team.

**1995** In the three years since 1992, ABC's work began to move beyond a focus primarily on children. The mission of the ABC and its partners expanded to include the well-being of people of all ages.

The first part-time administrator and coordinator were hired through funds obtained from the Annie E. Casey Foundation as part of its overall support for the community collaboratives in Vermont. ABC was recognized by the state as the regional partnership for southeast Vermont. Other regional collaboratives were developing throughout the state in similar fashion.

Additional ABC workgroups were established around such projects as an afterschool scholarship fund, a child care scholarship fund, and a support system for families in crisis. Notably, a health assessment of children and young families in the region was undertaken for the ABC collaborative, the first such regional assessment undertaken in Vermont to date.

The *Community Profiles* were published by the Agency of Human Services. These profiles listed over 50 indicators, graphed over time, that described the well-being of the people in each of the state's localities.

**1996** The structure of ABC's management and the leadership continued to evolve. In 1996, a voluntary executive committee for the growing collaborative was established.

The relationship with the state Agency of Human Services also continued to evolve as ABC joined the State Team membership. This move was significant, because the state team had adopted responsibility for the articulation of Vermont's outcomes and indicators and became the "keepers" of that statewide framework.

The state influence was also felt as a result of an effort to establish statewide, universal "Welcome-Baby" visits, which were conducted primarily by members of the local collaboratives.



Members of ABC supported the development of a long-term care network by a sister coalition initiated by the state's Department of Aging and Disabilities. In fact, for three years, the ABC administrator acted as facilitator of these coalition meetings.

Another network was established that year to support young children with social or emotional disturbances.

Regular community forums also began, aimed at educating and engaging more community organizations and individuals in the work of ABC.

**1997** In this year, ABC became the first community partnership to gain formal nonprofit status. It also elected its first board of directors.

The state's relationship with the local collaboratives during this period continued to evolve. One expression of that was a visit to our state by a consultant, Mark Friedman, to begin a long-term process of training and consultation around "results-based accountability," another name for outcomes work. The state also distributed funding through the regional partnerships from a new multiyear federal grant for children's mental health, called the "Children's Upstream Services" project.

In their ongoing effort of team building and collaborative work, ABC also took on an "assets" initiative, which began systematically augment the traditional indicators of deficit and risk with indicators of positive community assets on which to build further progress.

A second community health assessment was undertaken, which focused primarily on residents ages 45 and older.

Of the four school districts covered by the partnership in the Brattleboro area, three completed asset-focused surveys of youth, which allowed the community to compare those results with data from the same survey collected from hundreds of other communities around the country.

The monthly forums with a focus on community engagement continued.

**1998** The partnership decided to examine the flow of funds to and through various community projects. The board of directors established liaisons to each of the growing number of workgroups. In the first board elections after nonprofit status had been established, 4 of the 13 board members elected were "ordinary" citizens (i.e., not providers of services).

In continuing collaborative work, a new connection was developed between ABC and the Alliance for Life-Long Learning, a Brattleboro group that had been established for some time. An infant and child guidance program was created and an early childhood council, which involved even more citizens.

The community forums moved from a monthly to a bimonthly schedule.

**1999** This year brought a major expansion in the collaboration, with 28 new members and a proportional expansion of citizen membership. In fact, citizen membership had now reached 31 percent overall. As many as 140 people were now attending the community forums, requiring new organizational efforts, such as orientations for new members.

The mission continued to expand, and more formalized annual updates to members were published along with the partnership's first legislative report.

Following the next board election, 5 of the 13 board members were citizens, and the board held its first strategic retreat session.

The relationship with the state continued to evolve as increasingly statewide initiatives were administered through local collaboratives. The latest effort of this type was the "Covering Kids" effort. Vermont was the only partner in this national outreach program to achieve full enrollment of children in health insurance plans, using the local partnerships to undertake the work.

The asset development work continued strongly, and the partnership began support of a Department of Education initiative, entitled "Schools by Design." The expansion of the collaborative work continued with

formal connections to the “Out-of-School Youth Task-force” and the Covering Kids project.

The bimonthly forums were now organized around an outcomes-based agenda.

**2000** This year brought another major expansion of citizen engagement, with 44 new members in the collaborative, resulting in 45 percent citizen participation. Turnout at the citizen forums doubled, with around 250 people attending. This increase led to the creation of a civic leadership course and expansion of the new member orientations.

One of the most important publications by ABC was a report entitled “Outcome, Indicators, Strategies,” which used data from the *Community Profiles* to identify, by each outcome, which indicators were encouraging or troubling and which strategies were likely to improve the indicators. This effort was a solid translation to local work of the statewide outcomes and indicators.

The ABC work with the state continued to expand. The partnership was able to take on, with the help of state funding, the improvement of juvenile justice systems in their region.

The community forums continued to be vital, with 70-plus active members regularly attending or participating in workgroups.

The asset development work continued as did support for new efforts, such as the statewide and local “Youth Summits,” a truancy mediation effort, and leadership team forums. The asset-focused youth survey was conducted in a fourth district that had not participated in this earlier.

The forums continued on a bimonthly basis, aided by Phyllis Brunson of the Center for Study of Social Policy.

### **Well-Being Trends**

#### *Positive Indicator Change*

Between 1989 and 1994, the rates of injury to young children (ages 0–9) that resulted in hospitalization remained relatively stable. In 1996, the first year of

reporting of these data by the Agency of Human Services on a local basis, the trend began a steady decline, dropping almost 50 percent from its recent high in 1993 through the last reporting year of 1998.

An emphasis on families receiving new-baby visits began in 1993. At that time, ABC was visiting approximately 30 percent of newborns, which was primarily a high-risk population. By 1999, almost all newborns, rich or poor, in the Brattleboro area were receiving the voluntary early baby visits.

In the early 1990s, the Agency of Human Services began to emphasize child support payments as an important economic transfer. In the Brattleboro region, those payments through 1999 increased almost 40 percent to the point at which child support collections in the region exceed the amount of welfare payments.

One of the nagging indicators in all jurisdictions of our state was the rate of child abuse and neglect. In 1990, the rates in Brattleboro were 60 percent higher than the state average. Subsequently, rates of child abuse and neglect through 1999 fell 60 percent, almost twice the rate of the decline statewide, bringing the region’s rate approximately in line with the state’s.

Over the same period, the rates of children in families receiving food stamps declined approximately 15 percent.

The regional trend in the rate of young teen pregnancies (15–17-year-olds) paralleled the overall statewide decline of approximately 40 percent from 1989 through 1998.

As noted earlier, the Brattleboro region was one of the first to engage with issues of adult abuse and neglect. The rate of adult abuse and neglect victims declined approximately 30 percent from 1995 to 1999, approximately contemporaneous with the workgroup efforts on this issue.

Over the same period, adults receiving welfare declined by over 40 percent.

Also during the same period, the rate of adults 25 through 64 having injuries resulting in hospitalization declined 60 percent.

#### *Negative Indicator Change*

Of course, some indicators went in the wrong direction over this period of ABC's work. Notably, several indicators connected to youth deteriorated during the period, including the rate of **out-of-home placements** for 18- to 24-year-olds, which increased 30 percent from 1991 to 1999. A related indicator, the rate of **delinquents in custody**, increased by approximately the same amount over that period. However, this increase was balanced by a reduction of approximately 40 percent in the rate of **court dispositions for delinquency**.

#### *Indicators Remaining Essentially Unchanged*

A third set of indicators neither deteriorated nor improved over this period of ABC's work. This set included the percentage of **eligible population voting**, the percentage of **high school dropouts** (even though that percentage varied widely among the three school districts that comprise the alliance), the percentage of **new families at risk** (defined as new families with single teen mothers who haven't completed high school), the rate of new petitions filed for **domestic abuse**, and rates of **violent crime**.

## Appendix F:

### DIALOGUE BETWEEN CORNELIUS HOGAN AND GARY STANGLER<sup>1</sup>

One of the most challenging aspects of moving to results and performance accountability is building support among the senior officials who must lead these initiatives, if they are to have lasting impact. Two people who have succeeded at this challenge—Cornelius Hogan, former secretary of the Vermont Agency of Human Services, and Gary Stangler, former secretary of the Missouri Department of Social Services—discuss their ideas on encouraging senior officials, especially governors, to take on this leadership role. Their discussion ranged over a wide array of suggestions, including using results and performance accountability to help leaders set their own agendas, the need to share credit, the building of support within the bureaucracy, the value of expert advice, and helping the media to cover this topic knowledgeably.

#### **Building Senior Leadership Support for Results and Performance Accountability<sup>2</sup>**

*Gary and Con, what's your best advice on how to build support for results and performance accountability among senior leaders?*

#### *Taking the High Ground*

CON: For a senior leader to be successful, he or she needs to find a way to make a mark, to get ahead of the bad outcomes and the inertia of just maintaining the machinery of the bureaucracy. Using results can help do that. It can help that person get ahead of the "wolf pack" of bad outcomes and bad news that can drag you down. When you are known for being the person who is talking about improving teen pregnancy, you have the high ground. You can be in charge of your own future rather than being forced to react to what's in front of you. You don't need to make large changes every year, but if you can use this moral high ground to

change how you spend 2 or 3 percent of your money every year, over 10 years, it adds up to big changes.

**GARY:** All state leaders—elected and appointed—know they can't do this alone. The other great aspect of what Con described is that they can use this moral high ground to bring along the people who need to make this work. People want to attach their hopes and dreams to you. They want to make a difference and, if you convince them that you are leading them in a direction that will make a difference, they will do anything for you.

#### *Spreading the Credit*

**GARY:** Sharing the credit for this work is also incredibly important for making everyone feel they are involved in success. At the Governor's Education Roundtable, we presented interview data that showed people didn't realize "Caring Communities" was a state program, because they had been so involved in designing the version in their local community. I was thrilled, because this meant people saw Caring Communities as a grassroots initiative. But then a state senator pulled me aside and said, "*Gary, you don't understand, it's important that people know our role in this, too.*" So then we spent a lot of time trying to bring in every legislator to ensure that all of them felt they had a hand in creating Caring Communities.

It often goes against the grain of bureaucracy to share credit—or even share information, especially when the staff see themselves as the ones with the responsibility for getting information out. Some of my staff said, "*why is the Post-Dispatch going to get the credit for putting this information out, when we collected the data?*" And I had to say, "*That's fine; it brings them in as part of the solution.*"

**CON:** When you can show a curve that's changing and you can point to 50 people or 50 organizations that can take credit, you're on the road to broader acceptance. When St. Johnsbury has a 100 percent immunization rate, I alert the governor, so he can invite them to his next press conference and say that no one in the nation is doing a better job. That makes him feel great about

this system, and it made the other people feel great, too.

Sharing credit also works on the bureaucracy. People don't do human services work for the money—they do it for fundamental altruistic reasons. They've been frustrated by the boxes they get put in. So it gives people up and down the line more purpose in their work.

Our long-standing child welfare director had been quite traditional. But the day the governor pointed to him as one of the main contributors to reduced teen pregnancy made a tremendous difference. It dramatically increased his level of commitment, and his enthusiasm has gone all the way down the line to social workers at the front-line level.

#### *Managing the Risk of Poor Results*

**GARY:** One problem that we grappled with was the risk when numbers didn't show dramatic improvement. My governor's political people were worried, because if you are explicit about the indicators you are trying to change—which you need to be—and the indicators don't show improvements or even decline, you've done the research for your opposition. We've got to be prepared for that.

**CON:** Gary's right, there are short-term political dangers in this work. One way we tried to get past that initial resistance to publicizing "bad" results is to show a trend line that extends back far enough that no single person or administration is pinned with all of the blame. We use those trend lines to deliver the message that we all contributed to the problem, and so we all need to contribute to the solution.

#### *Changing the Bureaucracy*

**CON:** We also have to change the government employee culture so that bureaucracies aren't going to undermine leaders who try to make these changes. You can change the employee culture, but you have to have a positive message, say it often, and never let up. In Vermont, 90 percent of state workers say they know how their work contributes to the Vermont indicators

of well-being. And they say they learned about those results from the electronic communications we sent every week to the governor and every state agency employee.

**GARY:** Ninety percent of the success of this work is communication—communication that fits the 5 “Cs.” It has to be clear, concise, compelling, continual, and you have to connect with it. You also have to be careful. One thing we learned was that you have to give everyone—the governor, the House, the Senate, reporters, and so forth—the same information.

Leaders forget that a word from us can have a tremendous influence on workers. A note from us, and the employee goes home and tells his wife, “*I got a note from the director today, he likes my idea!*” He walked home with a sense of being appreciated. A lot of our peers go in with the attitude that they are going to go in and kick that bureaucracy, whip it into shape. That’s a guaranteed short-term strategy. Most of us are fired by our subordinates. If they want to get you, they will. I don’t understand this notion of blaming staff. Everyone should start their job with the notion of wanting to build their staff into people who will go through hell for them, not of wanting to tear down their staff.

**CON:** And people will march through hell to reduce teen pregnancy.

#### *Outside Influences*

**GARY:** Another factor is the branding from foundations that this is a good course to pursue. That branding provides a great deal of political cover. The endorsement from Danforth, from Kaufman, from Casey, and others helped give us cover and encourage other people to come to the table.

**CON:** Other outside influences help too—awards, messages from other governors, and so forth. That constant approbation from outside all adds up.

**GARY:** There’s nothing better than a peer encouraging you to do something. Our governor came back from an National Governors Association meeting on early childhood all fired up from what he heard from other governors.

#### *Technical Expertise*

**CON:** There’s another aspect of buy-in. People will not buy a pig in a poke anymore. You can’t just say, “*This is a good idea*” and expect leaders to support it. You need to have the technical basis for this work. The advice from outside people who have a sophisticated theory of change, who have a body of information to back up their ideas, and who can answer questions based on experience has been invaluable.

**GARY:** Yes, and we need to develop the next generation of that science—the causal relationships, the array of factors that contribute to results, the economics of prevention, the relationships between people, and so forth. Con’s method of using the insurance model—using risk management techniques to reduce the downstream costs of what we are doing or not doing—will be key. Lee Schorr’s new work on pathways to determine what affects children’s readiness for school will be another important part of the puzzle.

Another aspect of this is the need to show practical results—places that have used accountability to improve results and change the way we do business. Missouri is the “Show Me” state, so we need to see this work before we will really invest in it.

#### *Building Media Support*

**GARY:** The media are also essential players. We have to cultivate their understanding of this work and support leaders who take risks. People don’t realize that reporters are not “after you”—they are after one thing: to get their article on the front page of the paper. People think they are after them when they are just doing their job. If your integrity is unassailable and you help them do their job, they will work with you. When we issued press releases, we gave reporters the names and phone numbers of people they should contact to understand the whole story, including what our outcome numbers were and the story behind them. Because we had made it easy for them, they used them.

**CON:** Getting the media to support this work, even in my small place, took five years—five years of riding around in a car, all around the state with reporters,



giving them the message, and making sure they understood it. When our teen pregnancy rate went down, reporters would ask “*What program caused that?*” It took a long time for them to understand that it wasn’t just one program but a whole new way of government. They are bred to be cynical, so it takes a long time of saying the same thing before they believe you.

Our outcomes reports made it easy for reporters to understand the data and the story behind the data. So when a reporter called asking for information about one incident, I could point to the outcomes report and make it easy for him to get the data he needed. We had a child who was killed by a wolf dog that was improperly kept. We took responsibility for our mistakes that contributed to that incident, but the newspaper story didn’t just focus on that one incident but included the larger context that child abuse and neglect rates are going down in this state.

**GARY:** Another factor we need to consider is racial politics. Once a newspaper editor asked me if race was an issue in a particular situation. I said “*Race is always an issue.*” You always need to think about how results accountability will be perceived in different communities and how to factor in different perspectives.

#### *Thinking of Results Accountability as More Than the Latest Fad*

**CON:** We also need to figure out ways to encourage people not to think of this as just the latest fad. The way we do that is to use 10-year graphs—long timelines.

Another factor is the language we use. We have to use words that resonate with people—no gobbledygook. I don’t use the word “outcomes.” I use “teen pregnancy” or “child well-being.”

**GARY:** Yes, “outcomes” doesn’t have a constituency; “teen pregnancy” does.

**CON:** I also think we should start using the word “responsibility” rather than “accountability.” Accountability is a proper word for programs, but it sounds like a fad word. Responsibility is an ancient word that has meaning for everyone. Also we need to think about

where we are ready to go with this. We’re not ready to put this into a budgeting process, for example.

#### *Last Words*

**CON:** Great frustration exists in government at all levels, and that’s what brings out some of the anger and tension in all the relationships—between elected officials and advocates, between the executive and legislative branches, and others. There is something about the language of this work that is so basic and reaches people on such a human level, that it brings out the best in people. It allows—it requires—us to think beyond ourselves and our own boundaries. Thoughtful policymakers connect to this work instinctively.

**GARY:** When you bring the senior leadership something they can do, you’re a leg up on getting their attention. There is such a pervasive belief that nothing works, it makes it hard for senior leaders to act. But if you can bring them something they can run with, something they can use to make an impact and feel appreciated, you’ll have a better shot at getting their support. So often, advocates will come to us and say, “*We want high-quality child care for all children, and it will cost lots of money.*” That’s all fine and good, but it’s hard to implement. The perfect is the enemy of the good. If it doesn’t get us to utopia, they don’t think it’s good enough. And then government takes the blame.

Once when I was traveling with the governor, we were talking about Caring Communities, and I pulled out the real estate section of the paper. One of the houses that was listed described one of its assets as being in a Caring Communities neighborhood. I said to the governor, “*I’ve spent most of my career having human services chased out of communities. Now I’m contributing to real estate values—something so tangible and practical for our communities.*” That was really a high-water mark for my career.

#### ENDNOTES

1. The dialogue was facilitated and edited by Sara Watson of The Finance Project with input from Lynn DeLapp.
2. Hogan, Cornelius D., and Murphey, David A. *Toward an “Economics of Prevention”: Illustrations from Vermont’s Experience*. Washington, DC: The Finance Project, 2000.



# Appendix G:

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