

Economic Mobility as a Coaching Model

David Griffith 20 February 2018

In the Fall of 2016, the board and staff of Episcopal Community Services met to kick off our strategic planning process. On our radar was the data¹ on poverty in America and specifically in Philadelphia. The long and the short of it was that poverty in 1960 and 2015 primarily affected the same percentage of the population. Yet, adjusted for inflation the 2015 rate was significantly worse. Poverty in Philadelphia according to data was an intergenerational issue and affected one in four individuals.

We concluded that as an agency focused on poverty, we were not driving the impact of eliminating poverty on the individuals we served. The language we adopted and the approach we aimed at in our forward-planning was to "get out of the maintenance game and get into the change game." Yet, to state it plainly, while we had programs that were well regarded, they were not driving the desired results of reducing poverty rates for our clients."

Consequently, we looked at our case management models and program approaches and undertook an extensive review. We sought out research to evaluate strategies that would provide the impacts we were seeking. We knew that the current studies in Cognitive Behavior Therapy

(CBT) which we had been using in our youth programming, the work with brain science, and the work with reward-based coaching was showing significant results. Our journey brought us to EMPATH in Boston (formally Crittenton Women's Union) and their economic mobility model. Their experience strongly suggests a successful approach to end maintenance and drive individual change.

The model's premise is that individuals that are one hundred percent in crisis and cannot deal with activities that will lead them out of poverty. By intentionally working with individuals in a coaching approach that incorporates rewards and financial incentives to achieve self-identified goals one can move an individual from one hundred percent in crisis to significantly reduced rates. Targets and the associated strategies focus on family stability, health and well-being, financial management, education, training, and employment and career. The end game is to work with an individual to build a bridge to help them arrive at a place where they are at or exceed MIT's living wage target of \$28.20 per hour while having their other life elements in place. The key is the mentoring model of goal setting and working with an individual in an ongoing environment to help them set their own goals and strategies and then implement them. The end game is self-sufficiency.

ECS is currently adapting a model for Philadelphia and implementing this model into our current programs.

Specifically, we are focused on integrating the model into our Out of School Time, St Barnabas Woman's Shelter, youth and workforce development programs, and both our housing programs, FASST and rapid rehousing. By 2019, our plan calls for starting a new dedicated program of mentoring for individuals experiencing poverty within the communities we serve.

The agency has trained every employee in the model and the coaching methodology. As with any significant shift in approach, we will learn what works for our participants and measure the impacts and the strategies we take and then adjust accordingly. Our board is invested in this transformation, and we have established a three-year schedule to implement the changeover fully. One needs to note that the model estimates working with a given individual over a four to five year period. Our early results indicate strong participant interest and engagement. As an agency, we will seek funding to support this growth through foundations, annual funding, endowment growth, and B corp programs.

We believe that the coaching and mentoring approach for creating economic mobility shows significant promise. The data from other agencies undertaking this approach supports this view. As we track our progress with our transformation, the proof will be in the individual results achieved and the permanency of the results. In addition to this change in approach, we have also undertaken the creation of an advocacy function in the agency to drive

public policy changes at both an agency, board, and stakeholder level.

For additional information, and to stay up to date on our program please visit www.ecsphilly.org or to reach the author directly email griffithd@ecsphilly.org.

Author Bio

Dave Griffith is the Executive Director and Head Coach at Episcopal Community Services of Philadelphia. He is the first non-clergy, nonsocial worker to lead the 147-year-old agency.

Dave also serves as the Chairman of the Modern Group Ltd, Delaware Valley Floral Group, Hooper Inc., and Verus, and is a director of Mountain Lakes Spirits and The JJ Haiones Company.

Works Cited

¹ www.washingtonpost.com