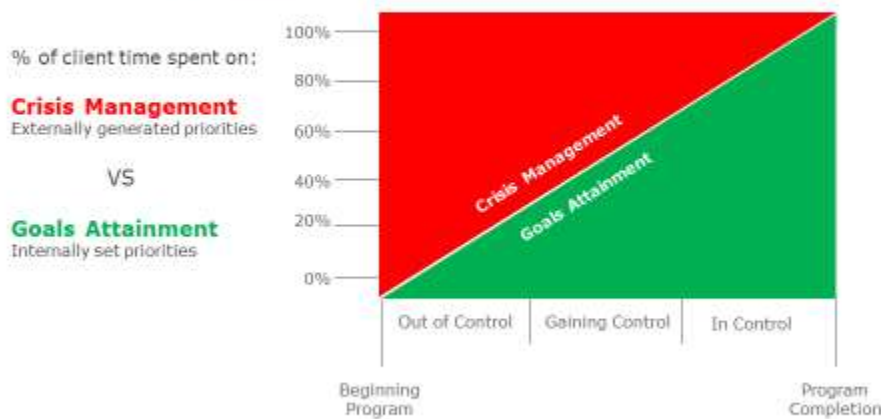


## Shifting Focus from Crises to Goals

By David Griffith, Director of Episcopal Community Services

ACHIEVING OUR MISSION

### Shifting focus from crises to goals.



In 2016, Episcopal Community Services began an agency transformation. For 150 years, the agency has run to put out fires across Philadelphia, addressing some of the most critical and challenging issues impacting individuals and families. That issue today is intergenerational poverty.

On review of the data, the staff and the board concluded that both our own approach, and that of many others, to poverty could be seen as maintaining individuals in poverty. This inspired us to evolve -- our question and quest became how can we get into the business of changing lives?

The answer is the green edge of the wedge.

Through research, we identified an agency in Boston, Empath, which has developed an approach based on the best available brain science to coach individuals. They rely on the science that when an individual is in deep crisis, the brain's cognitive function is severely reduced. The ability to problem solve and deal with all of the challenges that deep poverty presents is simply not there. If people can be moved out of crisis mode by being given the skills to do so on their own, then cognitive function improves, crises are reduced, and the ability to get on the path to economic mobility is created. Our work is to move people to the green edge of the wedge.

Rather than traditional case management methods, the approach takes on the form of coaching. An individual is evaluated against five criteria: family stability which includes housing, health, and well-being and provides for physical and mental health and networks; financial management which addresses debt and savings; education and training; and employment and career.

Once the evaluation is done, and our coach has established a relationship with the individual, a process of goal setting and coaching starts to take place -- small goals at first that build to more critical goals over time. The coach works with the individuals on strategy and problem solving rather than telling the individual what to do. As goals are achieved, a savings match occurs to reinforce success and to build assets that can be used to deal with the benefits cliff and the unknown setbacks that many face as they move towards economic mobility. Specialists in employment, housing, finance, and wellness serve as support coaches.

As the individual achieves their goals and problem solves different challenges, the brain's level of crisis drops, cognitive skills improve, and the ability to move towards economic mobility becomes real. New goals are set, and the movement and support continue. The data shows that the process is effective, delivers the impacts sought, and is sustainable. According to EmPath, Boston Ma, nationally, 10 years of data shows the same results.

The agency took a set of steps to implement this model on several levels. First, we trained the entire agency, since any member of the team may have the opportunity to coach a participant. This also helped to ensure our goal of ensuring a consistent approach across all of our programs. We launched an intensive program we called MindSet and implemented appropriate coaching in our other programs like shelters and out of school time programs that included social and emotional learning.

While coaching has an impact on the people we serve, the number of individuals we touch is limited because of funding. In addition to coaching, we undertook three additional strategies. First, we actively seek partners to provide coaching as well as the other wrap-around services. To that end, we are working with several agencies as referral partners, but also, we're looking to help train and share best practices using this approach. Both Philabundance and Habitat for Humanity Philadelphia are such partners, and we are currently exploring a place-based partnership. In addition, we are working closely with the Dornsife Center at Drexel. We also created and are growing an Inclusion and Advocacy function in partnership with the 138 parishes in our Diocese and other individuals and organizations to focus on the specific issues that impact an individual's economic mobility. Currently, these are cliff benefit issues and the need for a living wage. Finally, we recognize that program folks need to do programs and not compliance and administration. Therefore, we built out these functions. Also, we created a learning and evaluation function to drive our work with data and continuous improvement. We are focused on encouraging impact, or we change the approach to effect change.

We are three years into our strategic plan of transformation. Our mission is to challenge poverty. Our vision is a world where opportunity is available to all. Our values, which frame all that we do, are dignity, community, justice and impact. They serve as our North Star, and we are committed to moving from maintenance to driving real change in people's lives. Transformation occurs when one lives the new parable of the fishes. Rather than give a fish, teach someone how to fish, but what we know now is that you also have to show him or her where to fish.

For more information on our programs visit [www.ecsphilly.org](http://www.ecsphilly.org)

Post CV-19. As the agency went virtual in the wake of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic we moved all of our coaching activity with MindSet to virtual meetings and activities. What we have learned is the technology is making services more available and convenient for participants. We have also learned that we will need to adjust goals given the impacts that the current circumstances has had on participants lives. We believe based on the feedback we receive from our clients that coaching will be even more important in this time of social, economic, and medical crisis.

### **Author bio**

Dave is currently the Executive Director and Head Coach of Episcopal Community Services (ECS) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. ECS's mission is to ask stakeholders to "look up and challenge poverty" and to do so with courage, capacity, and will. The focus of [ECS](#) is to address the issues of intergenerational poverty through stability, prevention, and transformational impact programs based on leading-edge brain science that provides coaching and incentives to participants to achieve economic mobility.

Dave also serves as director and Chairman on the boards of The Modern Group, Ltd, Delaware Valley Floral Group, Hooper Inc., and Verus LLC., and as lead director of Crazy Aaron's Puttyworld. His nonprofit interests include serving on the boards of the Philadelphia World Affairs Council, The Economy League of Philadelphia, Friends of Foundation Academy (Trenton, New Jersey), Victory Farms, and The Academy of Natural Sciences at Drexel University where he is Chairperson and a member of the Drexel University Board and executive, audit, and community partnerships committees. He is a director of the Griffith Family Foundation, and Chair of the McEwen Family Scholarship Fund. He is an advisor to the Caliper Corporation, IBM, and Journal of Social Innovation.

He is a nationally recognized speaker on the issues of leadership, governance, and family business. Dave is a guest lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania and has spoken at universities including Harvard, Temple, Kenyon, and Rutgers. David is the author of the blog [Muddy Boots](#), and a guest columnist at the *Philadelphia Business Journal*. Griffith is the founder and principle of "deg" [Muddy Boots Consulting](#).

He is a graduate of Kenyon College and The Westminster School. At Kenyon, he received his BA with honors in Economics and History.

David and his wife of 40 years, Jacqui, have two married adult children, one grandson, and one active Westie. Dave is an avid fly fisherman and fly tier, and all things being equal would rather be on the waters of the Beaverkill.