



Solving Hunger Through Innovation and Collective Impact
Twin Cities Hunger Forum
Greater Twin Cities United Way and Twin Cities Hunger Initiative

Remarks of Tim Marx, Chief Executive Officer
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Introduction

Good afternoon. Thank you to Sarah Caruso for her leadership and that of Greater Twin Cities United Way, to Ken Powell for the continued stellar corporate citizenship of General Mills and his personal commitment and leadership, and to Rob Zeaske and Ellie Lucas for the entrepreneurial energy and commitment Second Harvest Heartland and Hunger Free Minnesota.

I also know that sometime during the course of this afternoon we will see or hear from Lt. Governor Prettner Solon, as well as from Senator Franken's office and Senator Klobuchar. I thank them for their participation today.

My final official thank you is to all of you for your dedication and personal commitment to solving the complex problem of hunger and other important social issues. Your work, our work, is not easy. Needs are increasing as are the challenges: Financial, organizational, technical, and political.

Let's work today to inspire each other so that that we, in turn, can continue to provide hope to the people and communities we serve. Hope is essential to improve the quality of our lives and the strength of our communities.

Now, I admit that until arriving at Catholic Charities two months ago, hunger relief was simply not part of my professional, civic, or personal repertoire. So my job today is not to be a hunger expert, although thanks to many of you, I have learned much. Rather, my job is to offer insights and stimulate discussion based on other efforts to solve complex social issues in a business-like way through collective impact, or more simply put by "getting everyone in the act, and still getting some action."

My insights are the result of participating in, helping to lead, and observing efforts on downtown riverfront redevelopment in St. Paul, educational achievement and early childhood development, and, most intensely, on ending homelessness on both the state and national levels.

So here is how I and we will proceed for about the next 30 minutes:

- First, since "we all stand based in part based on where we sit" I will share briefly the role and

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- perspective of Catholic Charities so that you are aware of the institutional context I and we bring to hunger issues.
- Second, I will delve into “collective impact” and summarize the major insights and lessons that I have gained.
- Third, in my role as a new kid on the hunger block, I will ask some questions and offer some observations on what this all might mean for our collective effort to solve hunger.
- Finally, we’ll have some discussion during which I will look forward to your insights and questions.

Role and Perspective of Catholic Charities

I had always known Catholic Charities for its innovative programs that provide shelter, housing, and related support services. After two months on the job, I now appreciate that we serve 37,000 of those most in need throughout the entire region, and provide a comprehensive array of services and programs throughout the continuum of life from prenatal services to helping seniors stay in their homes, including food shelf and meal service.

Finally, we are involved in a variety of anti-poverty advocacy efforts. I don’t say this to be boastful—well, o.k., maybe just a little bit because I’m really getting to like this place—but rather because the context of our work on hunger is part of our broader work on poverty and its impact on people, families, communities, and the entire region and state.

We operate three food shelves—two in Minneapolis and one in St. Paul—and serve meals at nine of our sites that provide housing, early childhood education, and “drop in” or opportunity services. In our fiscal year 2010, we served just over 1 million meals, about 25 percent of these from our food shelves. We have provided backpacks of food for kids to bring home in the summer, seek to enroll clients in all of our programs in food support—262 out of 8,200 screened in 2010—and participate in the Walk to End Hunger, the Twin Cities Hunger Initiative, Minnesota Food Share, and Hunger Free Minnesota.

Like all of you, we are seeing increased demand—nearly a 40 percent increase in meals served at Dorothy Day and a 50 percent increase in visits to its food shelf so far in 2011. As we have seen the need increase, we are particularly thankful to emergency infusions of resources from our partners such as United Way.

All of this is consistent with the data showing that hunger is increasing throughout the state. According to the 2010 Hunger in America Minnesota Study, hunger has doubled in five years, and 85 percent of the food shelves have noted increased demand as have 71 percent of the food kitchens.

This unsettling trend is coupled with other disturbing trends, including increases in homelessness and poverty overall. The 2006 Wilder survey actually showed a slight decrease in homelessness.

In 2009 there was a 25 percent increase. The use of our shelters at Catholic Charities has increased by a similar amount from 2008 to 2010. The boom of the 1990s resulted in falling poverty rates—to just under 7 percent in the Twin Cities and just under 8 percent in MN in 1999.

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In 2009, poverty has spiked to just over 10 percent and 11 percent respectively. That means 563,000 people in Minnesota and 282,000 in the Twin Cities were among the nearly 43 million Americans who were officially poor. And, as you know, the bar for poverty is pretty low. Thousands of other low income families are “just making it” and making difficult choices every day.

Poverty and homelessness are just two of the many major indicators of social welfare that are stalled or moving in the wrong direction.

This is not due to lack of effort—including collective impact efforts like this on hunger, homelessness, education, and regional job creation. Things would be so much worse without these efforts. And these efforts will be more important than ever, depending on what happens—or continues to fail to happen—at the Capitol in St. Paul in the next several weeks, and in Washington D.C. over the next several months.

As a result, we see it as increasingly important to recognize that hunger, homelessness, poor health, insufficient educational achievement and work skills, access to transportation, transit, and child care are all related to poverty and its causes. The Hunger Free Minnesota Study demonstrates the interrelationships:

- 40 percent of those seeking emergency hunger relief choose between food and paying their rent or mortgage, a 10 percent increase over the past five years.
- 27 percent of hungry Minnesotans must choose between food and paying for medicine or medical care.
- 40 percent of those seeking emergency hunger relief choose between food and paying for transportation.

So while we can and must continue with individual and collective efforts on each aspect of poverty, we must find ways to knit these efforts together so that people can be supported in their efforts to find paths out of poverty.

We need to make the case that solving poverty, while important in its own right, because it is expensive and harmful to be poor—is also critical to putting this state on a path to fiscal stability and economic prosperity.

Dennis Culhane, from the University Pennsylvania, led the charge to demonstrate that homelessness is expensive and it’s smarter to invest in ending it; Art Rolnick, while at the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis, demonstrated the benefit of investing in early childhood education, and the long-term cost of failing to do so; and Children’s Health Watch, the University of Minnesota Food Center, and others have demonstrated that hunger is linked to increased costs in health care, education, and lower productivity.

We’ve known for a long time that it is expensive to be poor; we know now that poverty is expensive for everyone.

If we want to cut expenses, solving poverty should be a top priority.

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Collective Action: Insights and Lessons

Ok. I am going to calm down a bit now and get back to collective impact and specifically to hunger. I think I've already offered one explicit and one implicit insight.

The explicit one is that on complex social problems like hunger, and clearly on poverty, "everything is related to everything else" so it is important to think and act integratively.

The implicit one is: "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good." Don't let complexity, conflict, and the paralysis of analysis prevent action. Let's not "do nothing cautiously." Achieving collective impact is tough work, and there are many mornings you wake up with a hangover headache with the precipitating overindulgence being late night meetings managing different perspectives, rather than martinis.

I came to appreciate this as deputy mayor of Saint Paul when I was helping to lead a downtown riverfront redevelopment effort based on the need to balance economic, environmental, and community interests. There were all sorts of perspectives and strong voices that needed to be accommodated. During one challenging period, the then-president of The McKnight Foundation Michael O'Keefe offered the following insight: "What is being attempted is subtle, complex, and never been done before." That was in 1997, and I have carried those words with me ever since.

Now we are appreciating more and more the necessity to break down silos, abandon isolated approaches, work across sectors, and align resources to make progress on complex social problems. Most of you have by now read or heard of the article "Collective Impact" by John Kania and Mark Kramer in the winter 2011 issue of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. This article describes the five elements of collective impact:

- A Common Agenda
- Shared Measurement Systems
- Mutually Reinforcing Activities
- Backbone Support Organizations
- Continuous Communications

I agree with all of these elements, each of which was integrated into the Twin Cities Hunger Initiative before they became recognized "best practice" by an academic journal. We Minnesotans tend to do this in a number of areas.

The insights and lessons I have to offer on collective impact focus on aspects or nuances associated with most of these elements.

Common Agenda

On achieving and maintaining a common agenda, the fundamental and most important of the elements, I have three points:

First, the value and importance of political will and champions in several sectors. It is very difficult for the social sector to build and sustain a major effort without aggressive government

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leadership and, of course, funding. Minnesota’s business plan to end long-term homelessness is an example.

Before this effort began, Minnesota had already been a leader in efforts to address homelessness through multi-sector approaches. But Minnesota moved aggressively to get to scale and to mount a major effort to end homelessness when Governor Pawlenty proposed legislation in 2003 that called for the commissioners of Housing, Health and Human Services, and Corrections to develop a multi-sector business plan to end long-term homelessness. This legislation was passed with bipartisan support. This was a powerful signal to everyone that government was moving in this direction. The governor would not have done this unless he had confidence in the public/private collaboration necessary to develop and implement the plan. So the initial work and leadership of many inside and out of government for a period of years inspired a major effort.

Once the legislation passed, government had to move. This took a commissioner to champion the effort inside of government, and several other commissioners and state department staff to undertake the relentless work to keep the effort moving. It then took champions in the nonprofit, foundation, local government, and business sectors to get on board and inspire their colleagues to action and overcome skepticism.

Continued political will and public leadership on a bipartisan basis was necessary to successfully implement the plan. Implementation of the plan—and related local plans—continues, although there have been challenges due to the economic downturn and a change in administrations. I am confident, however, that the pieces are in place for progress to continue.

Progress can be made, and important work can be done, with smaller doses of political will. But if political will can be inspired and maintained on a bipartisan basis, it can serve as an ongoing catalyst to the success of collective impact efforts.

Second, building and maintaining a common agenda when there is competition for resources presents some real challenges that should be anticipated. Let’s face it: We nonprofits are in “coopetition,” sometimes leaning more toward cooperation, sometimes more toward competition. For collective impact to be successful, it simply can’t be overt competition, or funders and public leaders will be confused, and everyone loses. In our efforts on homelessness, we navigated this by having success in raising significant new government dollars—another benefit of political will—having some foundations increase their commitments, and raising money from new sources which had not previously invested. We were able to do this because we could demonstrate tangible results and kept the competition to a minimum.

Third, it is important to understand the subtle nature of shared leadership. Determining when to lead, when to partner, and when to follow requires constant evaluation. It is a balance between appreciating “that there is no limit to what you can accomplish if you are willing to not take the credit” and knowing when it is important to take a stand when something critical to the overall effort is at stake. For me, it has been helpful to remember that it is “easier to escalate than de-escalate” when faced with potential conflict, and the value of candid one-on-one conversations.

Shared Measurement

On shared measurement: Keep it simple, keep it clear, and keep it to the most compelling items on the common agenda. On homelessness, this meant primarily the number of new housing

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opportunities funded and in progress and the number of people in those opportunities or units. If you don't keep it simple, you risk losing focus, and without focus, accountability suffers, and then the energy behind an effort begins to wane. Appropriately, resources are increasingly scarce for efforts that offer vague results, or as one of my mentors wrote "money and good intentions are not good enough."

Backbone Support Organizations

On backbone support organizations and supporting organizational infrastructure: This is not fluff or overhead. Think of what it would be like with all of those jets flying around without air traffic control.

But just as, if not more, important is to have someone, a single person, in charge of coordinating the work, hold them accountable, and give them the authority to hold everyone else accountable as well. On homelessness, Laura Kadwell had the title of State Director for Ending Long-Term Homelessness. Everyone involved in the state's plan had other duties in their "day jobs."

Laura was the only person who woke up each day and went to bed each night knowing that ending long-term homelessness was her *only* job.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities

On mutually reinforcing actions, let me offer a metaphor. Think of a Viking Ship with 20 crewmembers. Unless all are rowing at the same intensity and all of the time, and unless there is regular adjustments to respond to new conditions, you end up stalling, going backwards or, in the worst case, on the rocks or in the drink. Enough said.

Continuous Communication

Finally, on continuous communication: I was invited to New York for a meeting of several major Advertising and Public Relations firms who were commissioned to develop messaging on homelessness. One power point slide stuck with me. It read: "Facts lead to conclusions; emotion leads to action."

Collective impact is heady stuff, but it takes heart to stay inspired, and our hearts need encouragement. It's helpful at times "to listen with the ear of our hearts." I am, for example, moved by the words of Jane Brown, former Executive Director of Second Harvest: "When a person lives in poverty, they have many problems. When a person is hungry, they have one problem." Similarly, when staff from another organization reported that a young boy stated: "It's not my night to eat. It's my brother's," I was reminded that I have two boys, and this jolted me to remember that hunger is not just a complex social issue, it is an affront to human dignity.

Specific Insights and Observations for Solving Hunger

So what does all of this mean for the next steps, for the future, of our collective effort to end hunger?

- First, is there a way to inspire a heavy dose of political will? The good news is that all of the great work to date, just as with homelessness, demonstrates that an investment of political

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- will can and will produce results. Our public officials can have confidence that their focused and committed leadership can put Minnesota on the path to end hunger.
- Second, we now have at least two efforts to solve hunger—one is statewide and one is focused on the nine-county metro area. There is coordination, but is there a sufficient common agenda?
- Third, on shared measurement: I have spent several hours reading reports, viewing websites, and talking to various experts. I have seen references to food insecurity, food insufficiency, chronic hunger, and number of people on emergency food assistance, number of people struggling with hunger or without access to enough food; and measurements based on food shelf visits, pounds of food and numbers of meals. I have confidence in the Hunger Free in America/Minnesota report conclusion that “Hunger’s pervasive hold on Minnesota cannot be denied,” but would our efforts benefit from a short summary integrated into our “continuous communications” that all of us could use that answered the questions: What is hunger? How many are hungry? Who are the hungry? What does ending hunger mean? And how do we end it?
- Fifth, who can we put in charge. Who is ready, willing and able to be our Director for Ending Hunger in Minnesota? Who can we hold accountable and to whom are we all willing to be accountable? Any volunteers?

Conclusion

As a final thought, I will repeat the need for hope. Anwar Sadat once said, “You are not a realist unless you believe in miracles.” The realities of hunger and poverty are stark and foreboding; utilizing the strategies of collective impact to solve them doesn’t take a miracle, just our hard work.

The results of our hard work will, however, produce miracles, thousands of them, when no one has to wait their turn for that next delicious and nutritious meal that will help them learn more or work harder that day.

Let’s proceed to create some miracles. Thank you. I look forward to our discussion.

Catholic Charities serves those most in need. We help individuals and families reach their full human potential as we call for justice in the community.

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