Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin’-By World

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Examples of how to work the Community Sustainability Grid in Module 3, page 66.

Definition:

This is a thinking tool. It is used to develop comprehensive solutions to the barriers that GA graduate encounter. It is based on the information about the causes of poverty in Module 3. It is designed to help people take action on all causes of poverty.

**Case Study: Marion Ohio**

A Bridges community runs two to four Getting Ahead groups a year plus Getting Ahead while Getting Out groups in the prisons. Getting Ahead graduates from both programs are offered considerable support from the Bridges collaborative including:

* Municipal court Judge, the catalyst for Bridges in the county
* Reentry program: employment and sober housing for returning citizens, family court for those on probation
* A two generation approach using Getting Ahead for parents and The R Rules for teenagers
* An Employer Resource Network for four businesses to improve retention rates and help low wage workers get stable employment; providing Bridges training to middle managers and supervisors, a Success Coach to manage on time solutions
* Regular gatherings for Getting Ahead graduates
* Regular Bridges training for the entire community
* Partners include: Employers, courts, technical school, community college, university, mental health and recovery services, hospital, schools, Rotary Club

Two returning citizens told the reentry program and Bridges collaborative that the county jail was charging a $75 booking-in fee in addition to a daily fee of $50. When people were released from jail they were already in debt if they couldn’t afford the fees. Fee collection was turned over to a collection agency. Failure to make regular payments could result in more jail time and another booking-in fee and daily fees.

Using the Community Sustainable Grid as a thinking tool:

1. Name the barrier that people in poverty face in the top left hand corner of the grid.
2. Only work one barrier at a time.
3. Identify who is working the problem; Individual, Organization, or Community.
4. Work across the grid, finding action items for each of the research areas: individual, community, exploitation, political/economic

In this example the barrier is “Exploitive jail fees.” The Bridges collaborative (community level) is using this thinking tool.

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| Community Sustainability Grid |
| Barrier: ExploitiveJail Fees | Individual | Community  | Exploitation | Political Economic |
| Individual |  |  |  |  |
| Organization |  |  |  |  |
| Community | Returning citizens bring the problem of jail fees to the Bridges collaborative in the community.Individuals, members of the collaborative, join the effort to change the practice. | Bridges collaborative members and the returning citizens go to the county jail to describe the problem and respectfully request that the practice be stopped.  | The officials don’t agree. The fees have become a source of revenue.The Collaborative engages the ACLU and a newspaper to highlight the unfair practice. | Members of the Bridges collaborative including the returned citizens return to the officials who abandon the policy to collect fees. |
| Policy |  |  |  |  |

**Case Study: Muskogee OK, Mary Hicks**

Mary is a single Mom working hard to make ends meet. The water fees were adding up because of late fees and reconnect fees. Failure to pay the fees could result in losing custody of children because of a law that requires people to provide their children with basic needs, like water. She went to City Hall to work out the problem and wasn’t going to leave without a solution. The Mayor, whom she knew from Bridges stopped to talk to her that day in the lobby of City Hall.  She has his phone number, and if she has questions or problems, she can call him.  Bridges and Getting ahead gave her the opportunity to meet and get to know those who work for the Chamber of Commerce, the City of Muskogee, the Court House, the colleges in the city and many, many, other Getting Ahead Graduates.  A one day Bridges training is offered to the community. There is now a community wide initiative called AIM: Action In Muskogee.  It brings together the entire community to solve problems.

Old Policy: the way it worked

97% of the customers had a fee (late fees and reconnect fees) in the last 2 years. Those fees made up 1.4 million dollars of the City’s revenue.

The billing cycle was 7-9 days –the city could not make it’s bi-weekly payroll without those fees.

Renters paid a higher water deposit than homeowners

January 1, 2017 Policy changes

a. The water billing cycle will go from 7-9 days to 12-14 days

b. Renters will pay the same deposit as homeowners

c. Deposits can be paid out- ½ at time of initializing service, and the rest in monthly increments of $20

Several departments had to completely redesign their paperwork and computer systems, including the payroll department. This took almost a year to accomplish, but policy was changed to benefit all residents of Muskogee.

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| Community Sustainability Grid |
| Barrier: High water fees | Individual | Community  | Exploitation | Political Economic |
| Individual |  |  |  |  |
| Organization |  |  |  |  |
| Community | GA grad went to City Hall to find a solution to the water fee problem. The Mayor who is on the Bridges Steering Committee and member of AIM “Action In Muskogee”. He talks with her in the lobby.  | Bridges training provided to city officials and staff.Members of Chamber of Commerce, the City of Muskogee, the Court House and the colleges in the county and other GA Graduates took two years to find a solution. Several departments had to completely redesign their paperwork and computer systems, including the payroll department. This took almost a year to accomplish, but policy was changed to benefit all residents of Muskogee. | This addressed the problem that had the poorest people paying the largest portion of the $1.4M generated from the fees. | They found a fair solution.Policy changesa. The water billing cycle will go from 7-9 days to 12-14 daysb. Renters will pay the same deposit as homeownersc. Deposits can be paid out- ½ at time of initializing service, and the rest in monthly increments of $20 |
| Policy |  |  |  |  |

For more information on fees read “Privatization ‘Disproportionately Hurts Poor Individuals and Families

https://www.thenation.com/article/privatization-disproportionately-hurts-poor-individuals-and-families/