Economic Development as a Health Promotion Strategy: Opportunities for Maximizing Impact

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What is Northwest Health Foundation?

• Independent, nonprofit foundation that seeks to advance, support, and promote the health of the people of Oregon and southwest Washington.

• We achieve our mission through:
  - Grant making
  - Technical assistance and training
  - Convening
  - Partnerships with community
  - Commissioning research
  - Policy advocacy

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What do economics have to do with health?

- Unemployment linked to higher prevalence of ill health and high excess mortality

- Strong evidence that longer term unemployment causes deterioration in mental health in those who were previously healthy

- Job insecurity $\rightarrow$ negative psychological health effects.

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Economics and health - unemployment

• Chronic stress and anxiety associated with long-term unemployed may also affect physical health.

• 2010 Pew Research Center survey: 24% of long-term unemployed “sought professional help for depression or other emotional issues while out of work.”

• Mel Bartley at University College London: we need “springboards” rather than “safety nets”, i.e. “positive help in the shape of social, emotional, and improved financial support, as well as the opportunity for education and training.”

• Job Growers Inc – Marion County. Grant to develop cognitive behavioral techniques to provide behavioral and emotional support for long-term unemployed

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Low SES individuals have poorer health outcomes and higher death rates than those who are better off.

Relative deprivation is also associated with poorer health and higher rates of premature death.

All indicators of socio-economic status – income, class, housing ownership, education – point to worse health outcomes for those in the low end of the spectrum.

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Poverty and Health, cont’d

- Poverty is a barrier to fundamental building blocks for health: adequate housing, good nutrition, and opportunities for civic engagement.

- Income levels affect how parents care for their children, e.g. where they go to school; how engaged a parent can be when working two or more jobs.

- Poverty creates an unfair cycle that prevents children from experiencing the same opportunities throughout life: Poverty early in life increases risk for cardiovascular and respiratory disease, and some cancers later in life.
Reflecting on the evidence

To increase likelihood of success, community investments could:

• Focus on reducing the proportion of children born into and living in poverty

• Ensure access to education, training, and stable employment opportunities

• Couple job creation with better access to affordable housing

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How NWHF discovers opportunities for impact

- Community outreach
- Research that validates effective strategies
- Partnerships with organizations that share common goals and aspirations
- Responsive grant funding programs

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Economic Opportunity as a social determinant of health

- Kaiser Permanente Community Fund – awards $2.5 million per year
- Economic opportunity one of three focus areas
- Previous grantees in the field:
  - Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc.
  - Adelante Mujeres
  - Innovative Changes
  - Portland Development Commission
  - Hacienda CDC
  - Verde

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Case Study: Portland Mercado (Hacienda CDC)

**Project Strategies:**

- Based on solid market analysis
- Micro-enterprise development (up to 20 new businesses)
- Individual development accounts
- Intensive TA / counseling
- Cooperative governance structure
- Partnership with PDC
- Diverse funding strategy
Case Study: Thomas Cully Park (Verde)

Cully is the most diverse and one of the lowest income neighborhoods in Portland. It is also the most park-deficient. The City owns a 25-acre plot that residents would like transformed into a park.
Case Study: Thomas Cully Park (Verde)

Project Goals:

- Economic opportunity (workforce / contracting guarantees for employing local residents)
- Public / private partnership
- Community empowerment / self-determination
- Safe place for recreation
- New community garden
- Major partners:
How does NWHF measure its impact?

• Grant-by-grant evaluation
• Initiative evaluation
• Broader systemic / policy shifts
• Independent, third party feedback (e.g., Grantee Perception Report)
• Contribution rather than attribution
• Evaluation in the philanthropic sector is not an exact science
Creating vibrant, healthy communities: what will it take?

Initially, conversations to:

- Achieve better understanding of sectors – what does NWHF and other philanthropies have in common with banks when it comes to community development?
- Identify shared values
- Identify common interests
- Understand community needs and objectives
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