RESULTS INNOVATION LAB: AN OVERVIEW

DEMONSTRATING THE VALUE OF THE RESULTS INNOVATION LAB IN IMPROVING EQUITABLE OUTCOMES FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Emily Nelson and Sheila Weber
Executive Summary

On any given day, Lutheran Services in America and our national network of health and human service member organizations work with 12,000 children in foster care, and over 40,000 children and families from coast to coast. Our member organizations work to strengthen families to stay together. If that isn’t possible, they work to help ensure children and youth are safe and connected to their communities, schools, jobs and families, and are able to lead safe, healthy and productive lives.

We are convinced that in the interest of children, their families, and our nation as a whole, we need to be viewing potential solutions through an entirely different lens, one that better fits modern challenges and realities, and one that makes us better able to truly equip and prepare children to be the successful adults they have such enormous potential to become. To this end, Lutheran Services in America has developed the Results Innovation Lab, part of our ongoing Children, Youth and Families Initiative, launched in 2016.

This paper outlines the key elements of Lutheran Services in America’s Results Innovation Lab. The Lab empowers providers to lead collaborative efforts with a wider variety of partners in their communities, eliminates silos too often found in standard practices of today’s service systems and programs, and activates all stakeholders toward our Moonshot Goal – dramatically improving the trajectory of 20,000 vulnerable children in America by 2024.

Inspired by a 2016 partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Lutheran Services in America’s Results Innovation Lab provides our participating member organizations in several states with the framework to maximize their focus on population-level results, data-driven strategies, and genuine impact on the people and communities they serve. The Lab utilizes a results-based leadership model, which calls for centering the focus around a desired population-level result; engagement and alignment of a variety of stakeholders around making a contribution to that result; and the use of data to activate a high level of action and accountability toward making an impact on that result. The results-based leadership model utilized in the Lab provides the catalyst and framework for Lutheran Services in America and our members to fulfill our Moonshot Goal.

The Results Innovation Lab utilizes the results-based leadership model to ensure measurable and meaningful change for target populations of children, youth and families. As a national network of health and human service organizations, Lutheran Services in America strives to ensure that all children and families experience equitable outcomes, particularly those disproportionately left behind. The Lab is designed to act as a catalyst that activates members to leverage their role within their communities in a manner that helps deliver equitable outcomes for all youth. It is geared toward helping create needed opportunities for children and youth to grow to be healthy, productive adults – regardless of where they were born, their parents’ income, their gender, the color of their skin, or their ZIP code.

While some may argue that attempting new, innovative approaches to ensure that all children and families experience equitable outcomes is too costly, despite being the right thing to do, the data tell a different story. **Not only is achieving more equitable outcomes the right thing to do, doing so is more cost effective as well.** For example, research indicated that Black children remain in foster care disproportionately longer than White children and achieve permanency, be it adoption or reunification, at lower rates than White children. Meanwhile, there is a cost savings of approximately 40% when a child is adopted from foster care compared to when a child remains in foster care, translating into a savings of $15,480 yearly. In addition, when a child reunifies with his or her immediate or extended family and exits the foster care system, an estimated annual savings of $25,782 is achieved. Not only children and their families but their communities and our economy as a whole stand to reap significant benefits by helping children thrive and reach their full potential.
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BACKGROUND: HISTORY OF RESULTS WORK

For those in the nonprofit sector, success often is measured by the impact an organization makes on the lives of those in its community. Traditionally, leaders focus on obtaining funding and securing contracts for service provision, and success is measured through quantitative program outcomes such as the number of clients served (Friedman, 2015). This approach fails to address several key concerns.

First, it neglects to examine outcomes based on whether clients’ lives are truly better off from having received the program service, i.e. the impact that service made on improving the trajectory of a client’s life. The traditional approach also fails to address larger systemic issues, including barriers that hinder equitable opportunity and perpetuate negative trends, such as the reasons behind why youth of color are disproportionately suspended from school, placed in foster care, or arrested and incarcerated. Such a narrow vision promotes temporary solutions, and lack of focus on why these issues recur contributes to a cycle of ineffectiveness in social programming. At best, focusing on the means (the delivery of a service) versus the end results (the client and community being better off) may improve outcomes marginally, yet the work fails to meet its potential for society’s most vulnerable.

Prior to developing a results-based leadership approach, Lutheran Services in America member organizations generally were not given tools or brought together to harness their potential on a broader scale. They functioned as independent entities making collaboration with fellow members around a shared goal or effort difficult. Lutheran Services in America developed the Results Innovation Lab to unify member organizations and impact vulnerable populations. The Lab therefore is a collaborative learning model dedicated to producing equitable outcomes for disadvantaged children, youth, and families (Lutheran Services in America, n.d.-a).

The interventions initiated by the Results Innovation Lab cohort participants seek to address social disparities in numerous areas: for example, disproportionate arrest rates, length of time in out-of-home care, stable families, stable housing, and education outcomes for youth of color and youth in foster care. A participating member organization and their selected results leaders participating in the Lab cohort focus
Results Innovation Lab: An Overview

their efforts around their identified population-level result. While the participating organizations’
identified population-level results differ, each organization contributes to the Lab cohort’s ultimate result
– that all children in the US are nurtured and on a pathway to successful adulthood. To ensure and
monitor progress, not only does each organization identify a population-level result, they also identify
baseline trends and statistical indicators.

To establish a clear vision and cement Lutheran Services in America’s dedication to this effort we
determined a target goal and timeline. To ensure 20,000 vulnerable youth are nurtured and on a
successful pathway to adulthood by 2024 (Lutheran Services in America, n.d.-a). Termed the “Moonshot
Goal,” this written statement aligns with Lutheran Services in America’s mission and demonstrates
accountability to the populations our member organizations serve (Lutheran Services in America, n.d.-b).

Project Description

Currently, Lutheran Services in America’s network is comprised of more than 300 member
organizations across the United States, operating with over 22 billion dollars in annual revenue. Over 100
Lutheran Services in America organizations serve 40,000 children, youth and families every day in 523
communities across 43 states. In 2017, 10 member organizations participated in the Lab, improving the
lives of 4,000 children. The scope and scale of the Lutheran Services in America national network of
member organizations is ideal for cultivating a significant and lasting impact in communities.
Participating in the Results Innovation Lab will empower many more member organizations to contribute
to ensuring that by 2024 20,000 vulnerable children will enter adulthood successfully, laying the
foundation for generations to come.

Goals:

1. Participants in the Results Innovation Lab will make a measureable difference towards changing
   the trajectory of 20,000 vulnerable children who deserve equitable outcomes by 2024, and
   empower them to become healthy, productive and successful adults.

2. The Results Innovation Lab will equip and empower participants from across the US to drive
   change and affect systems at a population level in service of improving the lives of children,
youth and families.

3. Participants will make a measureable difference in their program population by an established
   12-month target date. Participants’ program population results will contribute to a broader
   population-level result established for a condition of well-being for their larger community. For
   example, a program population result could be that all children completing preschool at LSS of
   XX’s early childhood program will be Kindergarten-ready. This program population result will
   contribute to the broader population-level result that all children in YY county will successfully
   graduate from high school. Being a high school graduate is a condition of well-being for children
   in that defined larger community. Entering school Kindergarten-ready, as determined through
   assessments and other measures, is a known contributor to on-time, successful high school
   graduation.
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Objectives:

1. Increase Individual Capacity: Participants will make enhanced contributions in their leadership role to support their results work;
2. Broadening Organizational Capacity: Participants will engage their organization and the work their organization is doing; teach and engage the leaders of their organization; and share results-based leadership framework with programs beyond the ones they are directly focused on;
3. Broaden Local Capacity: Participants will work with local leaders, partners, and stakeholders to develop a concrete process for building the capacity that sustains this work over the long term; and,
4. Accelerate Progress: Participant teams will accelerate progress towards meeting specific quality targets.

Action Plan:

Develop an organizational commitment to results by cultivating results leaders:

- Leaders from each of the participating member organizations focus on producing meaningful results that are backed by data (Friedman, 2015).

- The member organization analyzes data regarding their population of interest at various levels in aggregated and disaggregated forms, whenever possible. After determining their population-level result, program population contribution to that result, and the accompanying baseline trend data, a Results Action Plan is developed in collaboration with a wide range of organizational and community stakeholders. Stakeholders represent multiple sectors such as public education, public health, community, philanthropy, business, public human services, nonprofit, and faith partners, as well as the youth and families served (Chawla, 2018).

- Ongoing tracking of population-level indicators and of performance measures demonstrates commitment to results (Chawla, 2018).
  - Most importantly, the results-based leadership approach requires leaders to investigate whether organizational and community efforts are generating measurable, meaningful outcomes for those they serve; meaning, that clients’ lives truly are better off as a result (Chawla, 2018).
  - This also means that not only are the clients served by the organization better off, but those in the broader community experiencing the same condition also are better off through the broad scale collaboration with community stakeholders, thereby helping to improve the trend line and close the gaps in the trends experienced by various sub-populations (Chawla, 2018).
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Timeline:

Each participating organization sets goals during quarterly meetings according to the results-based leadership model. Determining populations in need, measures of improvement and enacting strategies toward the desired result for the program population contribute to the Moonshot Goal. Together, Lutheran Services in America organizations participating in the Lab will enact meaningful change in the lives of children, youth, and families by 2024.

Each Results Innovation Lab cohort convenes for a span of one year. Each convening includes three in-person two-day sessions with a subject matter expert facilitator and co-facilitator, six virtual sessions, and ongoing coaching support from the facilitators and peer leaders. Peer leaders are members that have participated in a prior Results Innovation Lab cohort and are continuing to apply their results-based leadership skills in serving as mentors to new cohort participants.

Upon completion of the cohort, each participating member team is invited to participate in the Results Innovation Lab’s ongoing Momentum Group. The Momentum Group is comprised of former cohort participant organizations that continue to convene virtually four times each year to collaborate around their implementation and use of the results-based leadership model.

*Map shows the goals of the 2018–2019 cohort in progress*
Benefits: Demonstrating Value

With the support of the Lab, participating member organizations work to align partners and affect systems change in the communities around them. Such initiatives not only promote cost savings, they enrich the lives of those who need empowering help the most.

The following examples from Illinois and Wisconsin illustrate how our members are changing the status quo:

- Within the first six months of their participation in the Lab, Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois achieved a 12.6% increase in permanency rates for children of color (an increase of 10 children over usual rates) and a 24.8% decrease in the median number of days for the children to reach permanency (a decrease of nearly 8 months for a population of 90 children). Overall, 62% of the children achieved permanency through reunification with their families.

- According to a publication from the National Council for Adoption, there is a cost savings of approximately 40% when a child is adopted from foster care compared to when a child remains in foster care, translating into a savings of $15,480 yearly (Zill, 2011). In addition, when a child reunifies with his or her immediate or extended family and exits the foster care system, that translates to an estimated annual savings of $25,782 (Zill, 2011).

- Many children in foster care have histories of abuse and neglect. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2000), maintenance of a stable, enduring relationship with at least one adult is crucial for children to overcome trauma. Achieving permanency in a timely manner therefore is essential.

Figure 1: Lutheran Child and Family Services, Reduced Median Days to Reach Permanency
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**Figure 2: Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois: Increased Permanency Rates by Race**

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<th>#Permanencies Achieved as of 3/31/2019</th>
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LSS of WI and Upper MI focused on mental health in schools, as data suggest that students with unmet mental health needs require more support to successfully graduate high school. LSS of WI and Upper MI also referenced the following data in the interest of pursuing equitable outcomes:

- 37% of students age 14 and older with a mental health condition drop out of school (National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d.).
- According to a 2010 National Academy of Sciences report, costs associated with mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders among youth are estimated nationally at $247 billion per year in mental health and health services, lost productivity, and crime (The National Academies, 2009).
- Nationally, 13% to 20% of children have a diagnosable mental health disorder, including ADHD, mood disorders, depressive disorders, conduct disorders, substance abuse, and anxiety disorders (Perou, 2013).
- Nationally representative data suggest that around half of Americans will have a mental health concern during their lifetime, with most originating in childhood. Anxiety and impulse control problems are particularly likely to appear in childhood, with more than half of cases starting to show symptoms before age 12 (Murphey, 2014).

In Wisconsin, 78 percent of students overall meet the level of “proficient” for reading and comprehension in the third grade. However, only 65 percent of economically disadvantaged students, 64 percent of Hispanic students, 61 percent of students with limited English proficiency and 46 percent of African-American students are at a third-grade level of reading proficiency.

As LSS of WI and Upper MI began implementing their new School Centered Mental Health (SCMH) model to help meet the needs of the community, they quickly realized they would need to impact state policy to create a long-term sustainable funding stream capable of supporting their efforts. Therefore, they formed the Partners of Change (PoC) committee comprised of a group of individuals, community organizations, schools, coalitions, funders, community leaders and healthcare organizations committed to improving children’s mental health in Wisconsin.

Since first meeting in September 2018 to introduce their pilot program and population-level results, the PoC committee has grown from 15 community members to over 40. PoC has an established policy agenda focused on increased funding for SCMH services through changes to Medicaid reimbursement and setting a standard for care that makes SCMH comprehensive services common practice. Recently, PoC accomplished its first policy initiative and succeeded with other partners in removing a sundown date for Medicaid reimbursement of clinical consultation with school staff, allowing providers to bill for the supports they often already provide. Lifting the sundown date has provided an opportunity for providers to work collaboratively with schools to serve an estimated 350,000 students in Wisconsin.

By September 2020, LSS of WI and Upper MI and their partners strive to achieve a 5 percent increase in the level of third-grade reading proficiency for economically disadvantaged, Hispanic, limited English proficiency and African-American students. This will result in an additional 1,300 economically disadvantaged, 308 Hispanic, 270 limited English proficiency (LEP) and 270 African-American students who will read at grade level and remain on track to graduate from high school—a total of more than 2,000 additional students in Wisconsin.
Student Meeting 3rd Grade Proficiency Levels for Reading and Comprehension

- African American Students: 46%
- LEP Students: 61%
- Hispanic Students: 64%
- Economically Disadvantaged Students: 65%
- Wisconsin whole population: 78%

Figure 3: Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan: Chart depicting current gaps in 3rd grade reading proficiency for African American, Limited English proficiency (LEP), Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students as compared to Wisconsin students overall.

Figure 4: Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan: Outline depicting policy strategy to impact access to quality mental health services in Wisconsin schools statewide.
Value to Members

The total cost of designing and implementing the Results Innovation Lab with a new annual cohort of sixteen leaders from eight member organizations, along with eight peer leader mentors, a subject matter expert, Lutheran Services in America program design and delivery, and travel expenses equates to approximately $250,000 per year. Funded through the generous philanthropic support of individual donors, corporate sponsors and foundations, the value of participating in a Lab learning cohort is over $30,000 for each participating organization and their team.

Contact Information

Sheila Weber serves as Director of Strategic Initiatives. She leads Lutheran Services in America’s Children, Youth and Family Community of Practice and the Results Innovation Lab. Weber’s role is to co-design and co-facilitate Lab convenings along with the subject matter expert. She also provides coaching and support to Lab participants to ensure their successful execution of the results-based leadership approach. For more information about the Results Innovation Lab, or to inquire about the next round of applications, please contact Sheila Weber at sweber@lutheranservices.org or 202-499-5824.
References


Lutheran Services in America. (n.d.-a). About the Results Innovation Lab. Retrieved from https://www.lutheranservices.org/content/about-results-innovation-lab


