

New approaches, extended services

LSA sees success from Results Innovation Lab

By Rachel K. Hindery



Participants in the Results Innovation Lab from Lutheran Services in America (LSA) take part in trainings to build skills to address challenges facing the populations they serve.

The Results Innovation Lab from Lutheran Services in America (LSA) is equipping leaders to improve health, safety, stability and education for 20,000 at-risk youth by 2024. The lab employs a group-learning model in which participants develop new approaches for achieving results and engaging partners in their work.

“Through intense, interactive trainings with outside experts, Results Innovation Lab is providing participants with the skills to foster stakeholder relationships and create strategic partnerships,” said

Charlotte Haberaecker, president and CEO of LSA.

Participating organizations, she added, “share best practices and progress examples,” which they can implement in their communities.

The participants—select members of LSA’s national network—identify a challenge facing the populations they serve and use data to measure their progress toward their lab goals. They combine what they learned in trainings with their knowledge of the needs in their areas to change their communities for the better.

Since its participation in the lab, NYU Langone Health System has experienced improved support for parents and children through its family health center’s birth-to-3 initiative. Childhood vaccination rates have increased 9% and risk-factor screenings for families have increased 30%.

“In a preliminary review, we have seen a sharp increase in positive screens for maternal depression and referrals to mental health services,” said Larry McReynolds, executive director of the Family Health Centers at NYU Langone.

“Staff from the women’s health center and behavioral health center have come together to implement a new maternal mental health program called ROSE, an evidence-based intervention that uses prenatal screening and mental health support groups to help prevent and manage maternal depression.”

McReynolds described the initiative as transformative and said the center is reaching more families in the birth-to-3 category. “We decided to pilot the project at our largest pediatric practice, which sees a large proportion of children in Sunset Park (a Brooklyn neighborhood), and thus [have] the opportunity to have the greatest impact,” he said.

NYU Langone’s family health center expanded to a second Sunset Park location and anticipates continued program growth.

“It has been really helpful to receive support not just for my child but also for the entire family,” said Ediberta Vazquez, who visits the Langone center. “I was surprised how quickly the assistance came. We were worried financially and now we have obtained benefits for food. If I need help, I can come here.”

Supportive forever homes

Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois (LCFS) noticed different permanency outcomes between white youth and youth of color. Permanency refers to youth who are reunited with their birth families, adopted or placed in other permanent care arrangements.

Through the Results Innovation Lab—and the training that helped them know how to use data and monitor cases—the organization is improving outcomes for all youth.

Trust was built by asking each person, including youth and their families, their needs.

“LCFS of Illinois strategically worked to engage with fathers and the paternal side of the family whenever possible,” said Beverly Jones, its vice president and chief operating officer.

Leadership held book discussions and training sessions focused on racial and cultural sensitivity, and looked at real-time data from every angle.

“Our best outcomes have been around increasing permanency for African American youth under the age of 12 and decreasing length of stay for that same population,” Jones said, adding that they’re also working to improve outcomes for older youth.

Whenever possible, Jones said LCFS tries to reunite children with their birth family, something they’ve achieved for 65% of the youth they serve.

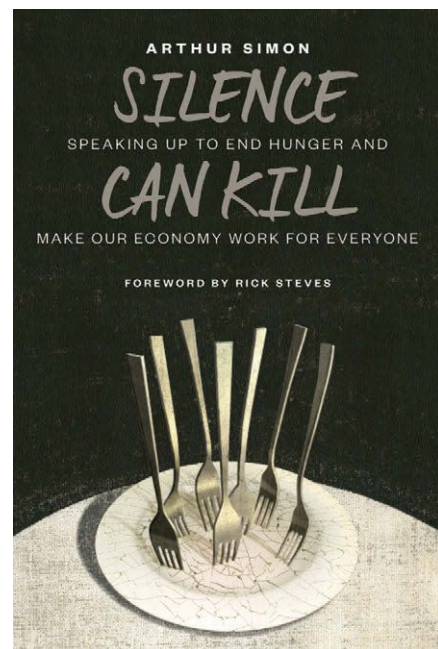
If adoption is the best option, “Illinois is good at recognizing kin outside of bloodlines and utilizing those people as potential ‘forever families’ for youth in need of permanency,” she said. “For youth and families of color, more cases are reported, more incidents are substantiated, more youth enter care and those youth then stay longer.”

This national statistic gives credence to the work LCFS is doing through what they learned from the lab.

Safety and stability

Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota helps youth who are homeless in Minneapolis and Duluth by working closely with stakeholders, said Peter Samuelson, its senior director of evaluation and impact. Like LCFS, Samuelson said the organization had noticed fewer youth of color were finding stable housing.

“We knew that youth of color were disproportionately represented in the homeless youth population, so we examined our



Eerdmans Publishing, July 2019, Paperback, 300 pages

“This book is both a powerful argument and a manual for making a difference. It offers a wise and insightful foundation for understanding the whys and hows of effectively fighting hunger.”

— Rick Steves, noted travel writer and author of *Travel as a Political Act*

SPECIAL OFFER:

You can order Art Simon’s newest book for only \$29 (includes shipping) and learn how an outpouring of citizens’ voices can bring our nation together and end hunger once and for all.

Order at bread.org/lutheran or call 800-822-7323.



breadfortheworld

HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

425 3rd Street SW, Suite 1200

Washington, DC 20024

bread.org



Results Innovation Lab participants are select members of LSA's national network.

own rate of success with youth of color, only to discover that 57% of the youth of color were exiting to safe and stable housing,” he said.

Haberaecker said, “The lab helped LSS learn how to use their data to recognize there were disparities in their successful exits for youth of color and equipped staff with skills to dig into that data, identify what was underlying that trend and develop strategies targeted toward improving outcomes for homeless youth of color.”

Since participating in the lab, the organization has helped 200 youth. “We have experienced a 33% increase in safe exits for youth of color, matching the average for all youth we serve at 90%,” Samuelson said.

Through staff training and listening to the youth, he said the organization focused on helping youth set and complete goals, positively connect with staff and demonstrate resilience.

Mental health & education

Using concepts learned from the lab, Lutheran Social Services of

Wisconsin and Upper Michigan is leading 40 community partners in providing mental health support for elementary school students and their families.

“Teachers were given an assessment at intake and at the end of the school year—82% of teachers responded that their relationship with the identified child or children had improved and 47% of conflict had been reduced,” said Amanda Krzykowski, the organization’s director of performance and quality improvement.

Once the program was initiated, third grade reading proficiency increased 3.2%, which exceeded the goal of a 3% increase in one year. “We also saw significant impact in psychological growth for the children in the program, notably that 59% of students improved their prosocial skills and 47% decreased problems with peers,” she said.

After their first year in the lab, the organization’s

School-Centered Mental Health (SCMH) program is expanding into the Milwaukee Public Schools, which Krzykowski said will help the agency serve a more diverse student population.

“Fourteen out of 15 families asked to continue SCMH services during the summer months,” she added. “In response, we adapted the SCMH model to meet this need and plan to provide summer services this year.”

Since 2016, Haberaecker said 18 organizations in 17 states have participated in the Results innovation Lab. Many individuals have supported the lab, and donations and grants are increasing. “We’re expecting to add another 32 of our network’s organizations from an additional 23 states for a total of 50 member organizations in 40 states,” she said. [L](#)



Rachel K. Hindery is a freelance reporter and a member of Grace Lutheran Church in River Forest, Ill.