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Making the Most of the Chicago Benchmarking Collaborative

Traci Stanley was busy. As director of quality assurance for the Chicago-based nonprofit Christopher House, she was preparing for the October 2016 meeting of the Chicago Benchmarking Collaborative (CBC), the data-focused partnership Christopher House belonged to with six other area agencies serving over 12,000 low-income individuals. Christopher House served as project manager for the CBC, so Stanley's role included management of data submission for all seven member agencies—on a variety of measures including demographics and outcomes related to education, employment, and socioemotional functioning—plus creation of data reports, scheduling and facilitation of regular meetings, and review of improvement plans based on observed data patterns.

To prepare for the meeting, Stanley ran data reports and studied the gains each CBC agency had made on the SMART goals* set previously in specific service areas. She was pleased to see improvement across the board on children's school readiness measures, an ongoing priority for the CBC. More specifically, the data suggested a link between school readiness and parent engagement with children, as measured by parents' reading to children for 20 minutes daily. In 2015, all CBC agencies had agreed to aim for improvement on this parent engagement measure as part of a general push for improved literacy outcomes.

* SMART is an acronym that defines the criteria for setting performance objectives as specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic, and time-bound.

Although the data suggested all CBC agencies had improved on the parent engagement measure, the magnitude of improvement varied among the agencies. The challenge for Stanley and fellow CBC managers preparing for the fall meeting, then, was not only to understand sources of variation, but also to ensure members shared ideas for actionable best practices in line with the mission of enhancing the impact of all CBC agencies across service areas.

The Chicago Benchmarking Collaborative: Overview

The Chicago Benchmarking Collaborative began in 2009 as a partnership of five agencies focused on education and other human services in the Chicago area. Together, these organizations served over 12,000 low-income residents across Chicago's lowest-income neighborhoods.¹

A Serendipitous Start

The CBC emerged as a result of the efforts of multiple organizations, including the Chicago-area nonprofit Christopher House, a “family of schools” offering education and other resources to low-income children and their families, especially underserved residents of Chicago's North and West Sides.² In 2008, Christopher House applied to the Chicago Community Trust for funding to improve its evaluation practices. The trust expressed interest in Christopher House, but asked if the nonprofit could enhance its impact by sharing strategies, ideas, and results with other organizations with similar missions, resulting in collective improvement over time. “The trust's feedback on our application was, ‘Partnering with other organizations will strengthen the overall proposal,’” Stanley said.

Christopher House leadership agreed with the idea of working more collaboratively with agencies with similar missions. Well before that time, the nonprofit's board had recognized the value of benchmarking: “Staff shared outcome results with our board of directors,” Stanley said, “and they asked, ‘How does Christopher House's results compare to similar organizations?’” Christopher House CEO Lori Baas added, “The board asked whether benchmark data was available. They wanted to compare results to better understand Christopher House's impact on children and families.” Such discussions led the nonprofit to seek partners to share benchmark data, which also met the suggestion of the Chicago Community Trust. “It was an opportunity to create a data set that didn't exist,” Baas said.

At the same time, several other Chicago-area nonprofits with missions and target populations similar to that of Christopher House had been pooling resources to build a more cost-effective data-sharing software platform. Christopher House approached them as partners, and together the group won funding from the trust, with the broad charter being to drive impact through shared data and collectively developed best practices, analytical approaches, and outcome measures. The group also hired an outcomes specialist with expertise in nonprofit benchmarking through the Center for What Works.

That fledgling effort grew into the Chicago Benchmarking Collaborative.

CBC Members and Mission

In 2015, the CBC was managed by founding agency member Christopher House. The other agency members were:

- *Chicago Commons*: A nonprofit founded in 1894 to help those in need overcome “poverty, discrimination, and isolation” across Chicago neighborhoods, with focus on children, adults, seniors, and families in neighborhoods that included West Humboldt Park and Pilsen.³
- *Chinese American Service League (CASL)*: Founded in 1978, the largest Midwestern social service agency focused on the needs of Chinese Americans. It had over 500 staff members and hundreds of volunteers serving this target population in the greater Chicago area.⁴
- *Erie Neighborhood House*: Founded in 1870, Erie House provided cradle-to-career services primarily to immigrant families in Chicago, promoting a more just and inclusive society through holistic childcare and youth services, adult education and empowerment, whole family care, and citizenship and immigration resources.⁵
- *Gads Hill Center*: Founded in 1898, this service organization provided accredited early childhood education, youth enrichment, and family support programs to families in need across Chicago, with a focus on children and their working families.⁶
- *Children’s Home + Aid*: Founded in 1883, the nonprofit “partners with children, youth, and families whose potential is at risk to create hope, opportunity, and bright futures.”⁷ It has served over 40,000 children and their families across 60 Illinois counties.
- *Albany Park Community Center*: A community-based organization located in the multi-ethnic neighborhood of Albany Park in Chicago. It offers early childhood, school-age, and adult education programs; business planning; workforce development; counseling; and food pantry programs.⁸

Exhibit 1 presents the CBC’s mission statement, including a focus on building a cross-agency and cross-sector infrastructure that enables agencies to collect data, share best practices, develop outcome metrics, and monitor the effectiveness of data-based program strategies.

CBC member agencies focused on five service areas: early childhood, afterschool (5–12 years), youth development (13–18 years), workforce development, and adult education. Specific program offerings in a given service area differed from organization to organization, and not all CBC agencies covered every service area.

How the CBC Works

The CBC’s data-sharing platform and meeting structure were critical to the organization’s mission.

Data-Sharing Platform

Data-sharing was central to the CBC's mission of collective program improvement.⁹ After studying multiple data-sharing platforms, the CBC chose a case management software (CMS) package that offered secure data-sharing—critical to the protection of clients' identities—but was also customizable, meaning it could accommodate the divergent programming offered by each agency in the CBC. "Once CMS is purchased, organizations have the ability to reconfigure data elements instead of paying the software makers for changes," Stanley said.

The CMS also enabled the tracking of children's progress over time, even if they changed programs within a given CBC agency. "Ideally, I get children in as infants or two-year-olds," said Julie Dakers, Christopher House Director of Early Childhood and Youth Development Services, "and I can track their progress, even if they transition into our school-age and youth leadership programs. I can paint a picture of them over time and that's exciting." The software also facilitated retention of data regarding why children left certain programs. As Chicago Commons's then Associate Executive Director Edgar Ramirez summed up, "The data is the glue that keeps this group together."

The CMS enabled each CBC agency to combine multiple program databases into one unified system. "Part of Christopher House's mission is to provide families a continuum of education: early childhood, after school, elementary school, the parents' education," Baas said. "Prior to using CMS, outcomes were tracked in multiple databases across schools. Adopting a central intake system allows Christopher House to gather information on families engaging in multiple programs and assess impact over time."

Moreover, the software facilitated running reports at all levels within a given organization and pushing changes such as new assessments across all member organizations. This was especially useful for grant and other funding applications, as CASL's Manager of Employment and Training, Ricky Lam, noted: "When we apply, we just go to the CMS chart and can pull out the outcomes pretty easy; I think it's very helpful." CASL cofounder and Executive Director Esther Wong noted that the agency used the CMS software for all its programs, not only those that were part of the CBC. "Your funders want to see numbers," said Colleen Douglas, Christopher House Associate Director of Parent Involvement and Literacy Programs. "When you develop data practices that are regular and consistent, you have those numbers all of the time."

The CMS also enabled more granular analyses than past packages had. "In the past I might just get a report card: red, yellow, or green," Dakers said. "Whereas CMS will tell me, every time you offer a college visit that's within an hour[s] drive, you get 75 percent attendance." Similarly, Christopher House was able to refine its approach to grade/GPA data by looking at individual grades to see where improvements could be made, rather than just pushing for wholesale GPA improvement. "We always knew that GPA was important, but I think the way we look at it has evolved over time," Dakers said. With the CMS, Christopher House was able to assess whether a C, for example, was a red flag for a particular child. Baas pointed out how the system had enabled

an understanding of why some Christopher House children fared better in kindergarten than others: “The kids that did really well were in our preschool program for two years versus less time. The data showed that the longer the children were in the program, the more they were on track to meet developmental milestones.”

However, as Stanley noted, “While each organization has access to identifiable information in their instance of the software, that information is masked on the shared data platform.” Protecting the identities of their clients, even from their CBC partners, was important to the agencies because of the sensitive nature of the details they collected and because federal law (i.e., FERPA) prevents the disclosure of such data except under particular circumstances. To further protect confidentiality, all partners signed a formal agreement to use the data only for program improvement.

From the start, some CBC members used the CMS more actively than others, familiarizing themselves with the platform and processes, creating their own reports, and contacting fellow member agencies to share ideas and issues. Other users took a more passive approach, entering data from their agency into the CMS—as required by CBC membership—but little else, relying on the summary and specific reports generated by other members.

A partial explanation for this trend was that most CBC partners did not have staff dedicated to entering CMS data and running reports—and existing staff were already entering data for multiple other databases, including those related to state- and city-based funding, each of which had unique requirements and interfaces. CASL’s Wong agreed: “It’s time-consuming to get all the data in. But it’s a good challenge.” Josh Fulcher, Erie House Director of Expanded Learning Programs for Children and Youth, suggested another challenging factor: “The strength and weakness of the CMS are the exact same thing: It’s very, very complex and detailed. There are so many different ways to run things that it can get confusing.” Chicago Commons’s Ramirez added, “It can be hard to get an organizational culture to be more data-sensitive.” Erie Neighborhood House’s former Director of Workforce Development Programs, David Swanson, said, “The CMS software is very customizable, but there’s a big learning curve and only a few people can actually use it.” To address these challenges, Fulcher suggested two ideas: (1) the possibility of the CBC securing funds to retain a CMS-focused staff member at each member organization, and (2) the creation of a repository of “most popular reports” to avoid searching hundreds of reports for key information.

CBC Meetings and Timeline

CBC member organizations met regularly for CMS training and to develop programming goals, strategies, and components. Christopher House acted as project manager for these activities. “We have an annual timeline that’s broken down by month of the activities that happen and the deadlines,” Stanley said. “I ensure everyone is collecting data and knows how to correctly enter information into the database.” But she emphasized the truly collaborative nature of the CBC: “Even though Christopher House is the project manager, we’re a peer agency and the spirit of this collaborative is making decisions together.” Harold Rice, executive director and CEO of the Albany Park Community Center, agreed: “Any competition [among CBC members] really is

internal within your organization, where you're pushing your staff to be better at what they do, and to be the best of the best.”

Exhibit 2 presents the CBC's meeting and data submission timeline for 2015–2016. In general, CBC members met several times during the year to share and study data and develop goals and practices. These meetings were the only opportunities for data to be shared across member organizations through a comprehensive report. During the summer, after the school year, CBC partners would meet to look at the past year's educational data and identify data points to target for improvement. “By September/October,” Stanley said, “teams at each organization are meeting and talking about selecting data points that they want to focus on and developing SMART goals for improving results.”

SMART goals were those considered specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic, and time-bound. For example, if 2014 data showed that 42 percent of students in a certain age group showed a 1-point increase in literacy scores, a SMART goal might be to effect a 10-point increase, such that 52 percent of students showed that level of improvement. Improvement plan activities designed to reach that goal might include elements of intentional lesson planning, provision of books and educational toys to support lesson planning, specific opportunities for professional development, and partnerships with local universities to offer family literacy nights or similar events.

Beyond typical academic outcome measures such as grade point averages and test scores, CBC partners could target improvement in socioemotional measures such as students' feelings of competence as learners, measured by a research-based survey provided to youth in the programs. Targets were set based largely on the performance demonstrated by other CBC member organizations on a given measure. Teams were expected to turn in their plans to Stanley by October's end.

After fall data were entered, Stanley ran a December midyear report to identify missing data and ask teams to fill gaps. Complete data were expected by December 31, and the CBC's funding depended in part on having full data sets. “A portion of funding is allocated based on specific criteria,” Stanley said. Member organizations with incomplete data risked losing out on a portion of their share of the incentive funding. “Once dollars are involved, CMS becomes a higher priority,” Ramirez of Chicago Commons said. “There's more urgency about the data now among frontline staff and management.”

In collaboration meetings held around mid-February, teams would examine fall data and make adjustments to improvement plans, prior to spring data collection. Spring data gathering included collection of post-assessments, such as where graduating high school seniors in the program had been accepted to attend college. After complete data were available, CBC agencies met to compare progress against improvement plans and set new goals and tactics, and subsequently reported on their progress, completing that year's cycle. A data report was emailed to participants after the meetings, as well.

CBC members occasionally got together outside the formal meeting structure. For example, Erie Neighborhood House and Christopher House managers sometimes met casually or spoke by phone. CBC organizations also encountered one another occasionally at meetings sponsored by funders of specific service areas. “We as CEOs might run into each other at events and may or may

not discuss the CMS at those,” CASL’s Wong said. Her colleague Andrew Pang, Youth Council Assistant, suggested it might be helpful for an annual CBC meeting to discuss bigger-picture issues: “Maybe once a year, we can have a bigger discussion about how we can improve each other’s programs.”

CBC Performance Measurement

The CBC member agencies had agreed to measure their collective performance on the basis of three overarching criteria. First, organizations were expected to submit data on time and with accuracy. Second, meeting attendance was required. “For peer learning to occur, it is crucial that staff across organizations participate in meetings,” Stanley said. “In particular, program directors and managers who are empowered to make program adjustments and allocate budget expenses based on data.” The third criterion was that each organization was expected to have at least one SMART improvement plan.

Data-Related Challenges Facing CBC

While the CBC functioned well overall, it also faced challenges on multiple fronts, especially those related to the magnitude of data collection and subjectivity of assessment. Just making the time to ensure comprehensive data collection and analysis was a large, ongoing demand. Christopher House trained CBC members on data quality issues, including through a handbook. Beyond that, “ensuring staff efforts are aligned across multiple organizations offering a range of services at several sites is not easy,” Stanley said. “Are staff across seven agencies speaking a common language regarding evaluation and how [are we] to use data to inform action?”

Staff within and across member organizations may have had different rating standards for any given measure, as well. “Teams from different agencies might not use the same level of rigor when assigning ratings,” Stanley said. Erie House’s Fulcher agreed: “Every organization’s in a different place, so you’re not always comparing apples to apples.” That meant that sometimes what looked like higher or lower relative scores on an outcome measure were actually artifacts of rating biases. “Staff administering assessments across partnering organizations need professional development to learn how to assess and assign ratings,” Stanley said.

Fulcher cited a specific challenge related to making data comparisons across CBC agencies: “The hardest thing for me is that there’s no control group. So, what’s the measuring stick that we’re all measuring against?”

The CBC worked to address these issues by administering training and testing to boost the validity and reliability of assessment approaches. The organization also encouraged discussion of standardized outcome criteria, such as what constituted grounds for dismissal of a student from an academic program (e.g., missing two months of class). Individual agencies also developed and refined measures based on patterns in the data, such as a development measure that was too stringent for most children of a certain age group to meet. Still, subjectivity of assessment represented an ongoing challenge.

Developing a Literacy-Related Improvement Plan

In 2016 all CBC agencies had committed to improve literacy outcomes for their target child populations. Analysis of results from the previous year had led to the insight that literacy was a critical part of the broader school readiness outcome measure. This objective motivated managers to carefully examine literacy-related data in the CBC report—within their own agency and as compared to other CBC organizations—and to develop improvement plans accordingly.

Benefits of Early Parent Reading

Several factors had contributed to the resolution to improve literacy. For example, at a 2015 meeting, program managers from Children’s Home + Aid shared information about their Raising a Reader initiative. The program sought to increase the time parents engaged with their children at home, especially with regard to reading to them. “So, it’s really looking at establishing home routines of reading to children,” said Jan Stepto Millet, Children’s Home + Aid Vice President of Early Childhood Services.

In line with this, the CBC had in place since 2011 a semiannual questionnaire that asked about parent engagement, including with regard to spending time with their children and reading to them. Each partner agency collected specific data regarding both school readiness and the frequency with which parents read to children (as an indicator of general involvement in their children’s development). **Exhibits 3** and **4** present outcome results for spring 2015 for each of the CBC agencies on parent engagement (reading to their children) and school readiness (using literacy as an indicator), respectively. **Exhibit 5** presents a template that CBC members were provided to use for development of a literacy improvement plan.

The **Appendix** describes the points of view of managers at three CBC member agencies—Christopher House, the Chinese American Service League, and Erie Neighborhood House—with emphasis on their thoughts about how early parent reading fits into the agencies’ literacy outcomes.

Making the Most of the CBC

Christopher House’s Stanley and her fellow CBC agency executives and managers had the same goal: use shared data to generate collective understanding, insights, and best practices across all service areas for enhanced impact. Thus, the upcoming October 2016 meeting represented yet another opportunity to carry out the CBC’s mission.

School readiness, as promoted by parent engagement in the form of daily reading to children, was a critical area for CBC analysis and improvement. As the meeting approached, all participants thought carefully about the data patterns related to these specific outcomes. They examined their own agency’s results and how these compared to those of other CBC members to understand not only the factors and practices driving the results, but also how they could share these and learn from other agencies. They hoped to arrive at the best collective insights and practices, largely through the development of effective SMART goals to ensure their target populations improved on key measures.

Exhibit I: CBC Mission Statement

Mission of the Chicago Benchmarking Collaborative

- Build a cross-agency and cross-sector infrastructure through which agencies collect carefully vetted data, share best practices, and track the efficacy of data-driven strategies for program improvement.
- Utilize this infrastructure to exponentially increase member agencies' abilities to positively impact clients.

The Collaborative is dedicated to increasing the quality of services offered to low-income families. To this end, the Collaborative:

- Sets standardized desired outcomes
- Employs uniform, research-based assessments
- Tracks data in a shared database
- Discusses findings together
- Implements data-based program improvements
- Drives meaningful and tangible change for Chicago's at-risk population

Source: Chicago Benchmarking Collaborative, <https://christopherhouse.org/chicago-benchmarking-collaborative> (accessed August 23, 2016).

Exhibit 2: CBC Data and Report Timeline, 2015–2016

| Month | Action Item | Specific Reporting Deadline or CBC Requirement |
|----------------|--|--|
| September 2015 | Christopher House offers CMS trainings; agencies collect and enter fall data in CMS | At least one staff person from each agency participates in the training |
| October | Agencies develop improvement plans based on data, and collect and enter fall data in CMS | 10/30 Improvement plans are sent to CBC Project Manager |
| November | Agencies collect and enter fall data in CMS | 11/13 Fall batch upload complete 11/30 All fall data is entered in CMS |
| December | Christopher House produces draft data quality reports; agencies make data corrections if needed | 12/16 Draft midyear data quality reports sent to partners 12/16 Term 1 report cards recorded in CMS 12/31 All data corrections are complete |
| January 2016 | Christopher House produces final data quality reports Christopher House produces outcome data reports | 1/15 Final midyear data quality reports are sent to partners 1/29 Midyear outcome reports are sent to partners |
| February | Collaboration meetings to analyze midyear data reports Agencies make adjustments to improvement plans, if needed, based on midyear data reports | 2/26 Midyear collaboration meetings held 2/26 Winter batch upload complete 2/28 Improvement plan updates are complete |
| March | Collect and enter spring data in CMS | 3/10 Term 2 report cards recorded in CMS |
| April–May | Collect and enter spring data in CMS | 5/12 Term 3 report cards recorded in CMS 5/31 All spring data is entered in CMS |
| June | Christopher House produces draft data quality reports Agencies make data corrections if needed and update improvement plans to include what was accomplished since plans were developed in the fall | 6/10 Spring batch upload complete 6/15 Draft end-of-year data quality reports sent to partners 6/30 All data corrections are complete and improvement plans are updated to include accomplishments and sent to CBC Project Manager |
| July | Christopher House produces final data quality reports Christopher House produces outcome data reports | 7/19 Term 4 report cards recorded in CMS 7/22 Final end-of-year data quality reports are sent to partners |
| August | Collaboration meetings to analyze end-of-year data reports | 8/15 End-of-year outcome reports are sent to partners 8/26 Summer batch upload completed 8/22–9/15 End-of-year collaboration meetings held |

Note: Chicago Public Schools report cards released: 11/18 (elementary), 11/19 (high school), 2/11, 4/13 (elementary), 4/14 (high school), and 6/21 (all). Report cards are to be entered in CMS within four weeks of the Chicago Public Schools release dates.

Source: Christopher House

Exhibit 3: Outcome Results for Parent Engagement (Reading to Their Children)

Outcome: Parents are more involved in their child's development and education

| Follow-Ups Recorded in Spring 2015 | Parents Who Read With Their Child Daily for 20 Minutes | | Parents Who Have Increased the Frequency of Reading They Do With Their Child | | Parents Who Increased Their Frequency of Reading or Read to Their Child Daily for 20 Minutes | | # of Survey Respondents |
|---|--|--------------|--|--------------|--|--------------|-------------------------|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | |
| Children's Home + Aid Society of Illinois | | | 32 | 30.48 | 32 | 30.48 | 105 |
| Chinese American Service League | 1 | 3.33 | 13 | 43.33 | 13 | 43.33 | 30 |
| Christopher House | 27 | 23.00 | 47 | 40.51 | 58 | 50.00 | 116 |
| Erie Neighborhood House | 15 | 13.00 | 32 | 27.82 | 42 | 36.52 | 115 |
| Gads Hill Center | 16 | 17.00 | 33 | 35.49 | 38 | 40.86 | 93 |
| Totals | 59 | 12.53 | 162 | 34.39 | 188 | 39.92 | 471 |

Source: Christopher House

Exhibit 4: Outcome Results for School Readiness: Literacy Indicator*Outcome: Increased school readiness (ages 0–3)*

| | Fall 2014 | Spring 2015 | Average Change | Showed 0.5 Increase ^a | Showed Any Increase | # of Program Participants |
|---|--------------|----------------|-------------------|--|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Children's Home + Aid Society of Illinois | 0.92 | 1.50 | 0.58 | 39.1% | 78.3% | 46 |
| Chinese American Service League | 1.00 | 1.90 | 0.90 | 100.0% | 100.0% | 5 |
| Christopher House | 0.85 | 1.52 | 0.67 | 58.8% | 94.8% | 97 |
| Erie Neighborhood House | 1.58 | 2.23 | 0.65 | 55.0% | 80.0% | 20 |
| Gads Hill Center | 1.35 | 2.67 | 1.31 | 100.0% | 100.0% | 9 |
| Overall | 1.14 | 1.96 | 0.82 | 70.6% | 90.6% | 177 |

Outcome: Increased school readiness (ages 3–5)

| | Fall 2014 | Spring 2015 | Average Change | Showed 0.5 Increase | Showed Any Increase | # of Program Participants |
|---|--------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Children's Home + Aid Society of Illinois | 2.98 | 4.40 | 1.42 | 87.8% | 97.8% | 90 |
| Chinese American Service League | 2.63 | 3.32 | 0.69 | 59.3% | 92.6% | 27 |
| Christopher House | 3.24 | 4.46 | 1.22 | 84.3% | 95.9% | 197 |
| Erie Neighborhood House | 3.20 | 4.07 | 0.87 | 77.2% | 96.7% | 123 |
| Gads Hill Center | 2.96 | 3.88 | 0.92 | 73.3% | 90.7% | 75 |
| Overall | 3.01 | 4.03 | 1.02 | 76.4% | 94.7% | 512 |

^a Calculation provides percentage of children who increased by at least half a point from the fall checkpoint to the spring checkpoint, for instance going from a 3.2 to 3.7 in literacy.

Source: Christopher House

Exhibit 5: CBC Literacy Improvement Plan Template

Improvement Plan Overview

The purpose of this document is to capture staff plans for increasing the number of participants who experience the intended benefits or outcomes of the program. To this end, each year at least one improvement plan based on data will be developed per program participating in the Collaborative. Improvement plans will be developed by October 30. At the end of the school year, by June 30, staff will report on what was actually implemented from the plan. Improvement plans will meet SMART goal criteria (i.e., be specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, and time-bound).

Steps for Developing an Improvement Plan Based on Data

1. Column 1:
 - a. Identify a CMS data point/score that staff will target for improvement (or identify a data point/score that staff want to maintain)
 - b. Determine by how much staff want to see the score increase (10% increase, 1.5-point gain, etc.)
 - c. Drop in the resulting data point by June 30
2. Column 2:

Record the **Action Steps** to increase or maintain selected data point.

Agency Name: _____

| | |
|------------|---|
| FY15 Data: | Improvement Plan (2–3 short bullets): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XXX • XXX • XXX |
| FY16 Goal: | |

Source: Christopher House

Appendix: Points of View of Managers from Christopher House, Chinese American Service League, and Erie Neighborhood House

Julie Dakers (Christopher House)

Christopher House was founded in 1906 as a settlement house aiding immigrants in their adjustment to American life.¹⁰ The agency offered services to underserved residents of Chicago's North and West Sides through a "family of schools," including infant school and preschool, elementary school, afterschool, and parent educational offerings. In 2016, Christopher House clients included 5,000 low-income children and their families; 60 percent of them were Hispanic and 27 percent were African American. About 60 percent of the families were single-parent.

Julie Dakers was Christopher House's Director of Early Childhood and Youth Development Services, overseeing all programs in these areas. That meant her teams were involved in the CBC in three areas: early childhood, youth development, and school-age children.

As Dakers examined the reading scores and literacy indicator for school readiness, she could have asked herself several questions: What's the right narrative to accompany these data? How significant are the gains? Are our data really comparable to those of the other CBC partners? And are any changes in the literacy indicator for school readiness linked to changes in parents reading to their children?

Brenda Arksey (Chinese American Service League)

Founded in 1978, the Chinese American Service League (CASL) had grown into the largest Midwestern social service agency focused on the needs of Chinese Americans, with over 500 staff members serving the needs of over 17,000 clients of all ages in the greater Chicago area.¹¹ Based in Chinatown and focused on Chinese immigrants, the CASL offered child services, elder services, employment training services, family counseling, and housing and financial education, working with a budget of over \$13 million.

Brenda Arksey was the CASL's Director of Child Education and Development Services. As she considered the benchmarking data shared in the CBC report, she could have noted that the differences in gains that 0-to-3-year-olds made on the literacy indicator for school readiness were more significant than those the 3-to-5-year-olds made. She could have wondered how to interpret the results, especially considering that the comparative gains of the older group were lower than those of children served by the other CBC members. She also could have had questions about whether she could rely on the data related to parent reading. Did these data accurately reflect parents' engagement? Finally, as she began to develop her SMART goal for the collaborative, she might have wondered how to put all the related information together.

Louis Falk (Erie Neighborhood House)

Erie Neighborhood House opened in 1870 to provide comprehensive wraparound services to immigrant families, who at the time were mostly Dutch, Norwegian, Swedish, and German. Today the agency serves over 5,500 participants annually from primarily Latino families.

Erie House offers a wide array of cradle-to-career services, including early childhood education, school-age programming, youth development and restorative justice initiatives, ESL and community literacy programming, workforce development, citizenship and immigration services, housing services, and family support programming. Erie House is therefore involved in the CBC areas of early childhood, youth development, school-age, and adult programs, along with workforce development.

Louis Falk, Director of Childcare at Erie House, had seen the program grow from two to twelve classrooms in his 30-year tenure. He managed a staff of 55 and oversaw a mental health clinic component of the program as well. As Falk reviewed the literacy indicator data for school readiness, he might have been pleased with Erie House's results. But when he examined the scores for parents reading to their children, the data didn't seem to match up. How could he make sense of the observed discrepancy between Erie's lower parent reading score and the gains made in literacy? How could he create a SMART goal and plan for improvement, taking the data into account?

Endnotes

- 1 Christopher House and Chicago Benchmarking Collaborative, <https://christopherhouse.org/chicago-benchmarking-collaborative> (accessed August 23, 2016).
- 2 Christopher House, <https://christopherhouse.org> (accessed August 23, 2016).
- 3 Chicago Commons, <http://chicagocommons.org> (accessed August 23, 2016).
- 4 Chinese American Service League, “Mission and Vision,” <https://www.caslservice.org/mission-and-vision> (accessed August 23, 2016).
- 5 Erie Neighborhood House, “Learn About Us,” <http://www.eriehouse.org/page/learn-about-us> (accessed March 31, 2017).
- 6 Gads Hill Center, “About Us,” <http://www.gadshillcenter.org/about-us.html> (accessed March 31, 2017).
- 7 Children’s Home + Aid, “About Us,” <http://www.childrenshomeandaid.org/page.aspx?pid=251> (accessed August 25, 2016).
- 8 Albany Park Community Center, “About Us,” https://www.apccchgo.org/about_us (accessed March 22, 2016). Data from Albany Park is not included in the appendices of this case.
- 9 Katherine R. Cooper and Michelle Shumate, “Sharing Data in Collective Impact Efforts,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, November 12, 2015, http://ssir.org/articles/entry/sharing_data_in_collective_impact_efforts.
- 10 Christopher House, <https://christopherhouse.org> (accessed August 23, 2016).
- 11 Chinese American Service League, <https://www.caslservice.org> (accessed August 23, 2016).