

Building Self-Sufficiency

Understanding the Effects of Poverty and How Three Greenville Nonprofit Organizations Are Accompanying People on the Journey to Stability

Building Self-Sufficiency is the result of a two-year, comprehensive study of frontline work in integrated services to identify best practices for supporting individuals pursuing self-sufficiency. The findings of this report challenge the traditional understanding of how nonprofit organizations can help people navigate a path out of poverty and suggest innovative ways to measure the outcomes of programs that accompany people on the journey to self-sufficiency.



POVERTY IS MATERIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPRIVATION

As traditionally understood, poverty is a lack of material resources—money, food, housing, transportation. However, recent advances in behavioral science have shown that living with a chronic scarcity of resources takes a psychological toll, negatively impacting people's ability to self-regulate—to think logically, problem-solve, maintain focus, and control emotions. Moreover, people living in poverty often feel powerless and lack confidence that change is possible, a feeling that can be exacerbated by the very process of seeking assistance to achieve self-sufficiency.



SELF-SUFFICIENCY HAS BOTH FINANCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPONENTS

Commonly defined in terms of financial independence and stability, self-sufficiency encompasses a psychological component as well as an economic one. Self-sufficient individuals can define their needs, prioritize, set and achieve goals, problem-solve, manage their emotions, and persist in the face of obstacles. They have confidence in their ability to exert control over their situation. Psychological self-sufficiency must be built in tandem with financial self-sufficiency in order for the latter to be achieved and sustained.



INTEGRATED SERVICES EASES THE BURDEN OF ACCESSING ASSISTANCE

Integrated services is a general strategy for breaking down organizational silos and easing an individual's ability to access multiple services at once. Making it easier for people to apply for, travel to, participate in, and coordinate multiple services can help save time and money and reduce the need for individuals to exercise self-regulation skills already strained by limited incomes.



RELATIONSHIPS ARE ESSENTIAL TO SUPPORTING THE BUILDING OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY

A large and growing body of evidence is showing that to maximize effectiveness, programs that help participants work towards self-sufficiency should center their services within the context of a trusting, supportive, and collaborative coaching relationship between the provider and participant. Coaches create opportunities for participants to repeatedly practice the skills, habits, and mindsets of self-regulation and self-efficacy, while providing consistent encouragement and support. Rather than being an unacknowledged byproduct of service delivery, relationships that provide participants with structure and unflagging encouragement should be a key design feature of programs that move people towards self-sufficiency.



ECONOMIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INDICATORS OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY MUST BE USED IN ORDER TO FULLY MEASURE THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC MOBILITY PROGRAMS

Traditional measures of self-sufficiency that focus solely on economic and employment indicators do not capture the deep relational work organizations do to empower participants and build their capacity for self-regulation. Measures that show progress towards self-sufficiency and assess increases in psychological self-sufficiency more clearly reflect the nature and intended results of the programs run by the Integrated Services Alliance.

IT'S TIME TO RETHINK HOW POVERTY IMPACTS INDIVIDUALS AND WHAT IT REALLY TAKES TO ACHIEVE SELF-SUFFICIENCY.