Wicked Problem Map

What if... communities wrapped around families living in poverty so that they could get the help that they needed? What if... partnerships between churches, businesses, schools, government and NGOs resulted in catalytic healing in the community? What if... those who had extra resources, be it individuals or businesses, knew how to best contribute those resources towards the building of a thriving community. What if...families could find healing from the trauma that they have experienced both individually and collectively? Would we see less children entering the foster system because of poverty due to neglect? Would we see less entrepreneurial communities burnt out because they have a rich support system of resources and connections that they can tap into? What would we see?

These are the questions that framed this project, and which in part, this report works to address.

As of 2023, an estimated 343,000 children were living in foster care (US Department of Health & Human Services, 2023). With the majority of entries into the system not being due to severe physical abuse, but to neglect, a category that frequently overlaps with poverty. A care sharing technology we got to work with that allows churches and community members to directly meet the needs of families and children in crisis in their community, has identified the foster system as the bullseye for systemic change.

So...where do we begin?

This project worked to explore how target churches can be better equipped to continue the meaningful connection beyond that first need being met without feeling burnt out by the scale of needs that families have.

Over the 18 month duration of the project, in-depth interviews and workshops were conducted with under resourced families connected to a selected zip code in Kansas City, churches serving communities within the ZIP code and multiple divisions within the Child Welfare System (CWS).

The findings from these stakeholders have been categorized into five areas of which have been analysed, mapped and summarised to provide wraparound outcomes and action points for each stakeholder group.







In order to build strong circles of care - we needed to understand what the existing challenges were in the system. So we set out to do personal interviews with the families - to understand what were their biggest needs were, to interview churches - to understand where the gaps were in connecting with families, and with persons from the Child Welfare System (CWS) - to understand their challenges with working with these families.

Through our interviews with the families, a lot of them shared stories of hardship and struggle but also of hope because they felt like they were in a better place. We wanted to understand what were the factors that helped them get to a better place and to identify moments of forward momentum that could help other families in similar situations. So we used a journey mapping technique and asked them two questions - 1. what were factors that helped you move from your journey from suffering to safety to stability and then to flourishing and beyond? 2. how would you help someone else walk through that same journey. The families had to pick and choose cards relating to physical needs, emotional and mental health and plot them out on a timeline.

The journey mapping with families proved to be a valuable tool not just for us but also as a way for the church to connect with families and understand how best to help them. It also gave the women agency and a way to voice what they really needed for themselves. A few tweaks were made to create the new Needs Mapping where flourishing wasn't an end goal on the map as we realised it came in bursts that moved families to progress, and we introduced a token for the person to physically move themselves along, which allows them the flexibility to look at their journey from a objective point of view. We also integrated mental health developments throughout the process their journey as these aren't limited to one moment in time but change depending on the season they're in.

Building a Circle of Care

Strengthening wraparound care requires the coming together of the efforts of families, churches, Children's Division and businesses around shared foundations of trust, faith, and coordinated support.



Mental health and faith must be recognised as integral, not peripheral, elements of stability, while material needs provide the base for dignity and safety.

Churches, trusted by both families and systems, can serve as key intermediaries, bridging gaps in trust, communication, and care, to create a relational ecosystem, where emotional, spiritual, and practical support work together for lasting family flourishing.

Findings

The research identified five areas:

Trust — trust is the core bridge and barrier, and that trust is built through consistent, transparent, and relational engagement, and not as one time aid.
Self-Awareness — the importance of shared accountability emerges across all stakeholders. Curiosity and reflection - the act of asking questions and engaging active listening deepens understanding and empathy.
Material Needs — material needs form the foundation for safety and dignity for families and that collective action across stakeholders moves families from suffering to a place of safety and/or stability.
Mental Health — emotional exhaustion is common to all three stakeholders. Comprehensive wraparound support must address burnout, provide safe spaces that people can process what they've experienced and connect to professional mental health resources.
Faith — a shared motivator for hope and purpose.

Recommendations

One of the nine recommendations developed from the community stakeholder insights is Partnering with Local Businesses Partnering with businesses in the community who are committed to seeing transformation in their crux code is currently untapped potential. The opportunity is to understand the entry points for local businesses to help and engage beyond just financial resources. Connecting with business networks in the city and understanding more deeply the capacity and resources that businesses give an excellent opportunity to consider the long term scaffolding for families transitioning from a hand-out NGO mentality to a hand-up training and employment mindset.

We've compiled a full-length report of this process and we would love to share more on it with you.

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